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What Will We Do When the Bell Sounds?

KURT M. LANDGRAF,
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When the bell rings in high schools around the country this morning, will our schools be equipped to deliver excellence? Recent trends are not encouraging.

Between 1990 and 2000, the high school completion rate in the United States *fell* 3.3 percent. We now rank 17th among developed nations in the percentage of youth graduating from high school.

Among the states, there is a yawning disparity on high school completion rates, ranging from a high of 88 percent to a low of 48 percent.

Most troubling of all, the grades at which students are dropping out have shifted — from 11 and 12 a generation ago, to grades 9 and 10 today. Dropouts are younger, less educated and less prepared for work, life and democracy than ever before.

That's the bad news. Here's the good news: Just as the No Child Left Behind Act is bringing tougher standards and accountability to grades K-8, there's a growing realization that we need to do the same for our secondary schools.

President Bush has made high school reform a centerpiece of his domestic agenda. In the states, Gov. Mark Warner of Virginia, chair of the National Governors Association, is leading a drive to redesign the American high school. The drive will be the subject of a high school reform "summit" this month.

"It is time for a new approach to high school," Governor Warner says, "one that both challenges our students more and gives them new opportunities to engage in meaningful, lifelong learning."

ETS is committed to high school reform. We believe high schools need rigorous curricula, taught by highly qualified teachers overseen by school leaders able to attract and retain highly qualified faculty.

In the coming weeks, we will publish research that examines high school completion rates. Our research will serve as a warning on the status quo, a benchmark for progress, and a platform for a vigorous national debate on high school reform.

When the bell rings in high schools this morning, we must be prepared to deliver excellence.

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FEBRUARY 21, 2005 WASHINGTON, D.C. ISSUE 4,701 VOLUME 232

Cover Story

James Traub 14 **Off Target** The U.N. Oil-for-Food scandal is not really a scandal. It worked exactly as expected. And that's the problem.

Claudia Rosett 17 **Blame Game** The U.N. Oil-for-Food scandal is the biggest scam in the history of humanitarian aid. And it's Kofi Annan's fault.

Politics & the World

4 **CORRESPONDENCE** Did the Catholic Church kidnap Jewish children? &c.

Jonathan Cohn 6 **TRB | A Little Trim** Not all Republicans are corporate shills who grab from the poor at every turn. Then there's Haley Barbour.

The Editors 7 **Empty Trough** The president's new plan to cap agricultural subsidies makes great sense. Too bad Bush doesn't really want it to pass.

8 **NOTEBOOK** Bush's unlikely dinner guest, &c.

Oliver Burkeman 10 **Amsterdam Dispatch: Going to Pot** Holland thought it was a model for Muslim integration into Europe. Unfortunately, it might be.

Joshua Kurlantzick 11 **Paradise Lost** How one of the more peaceful, successful democracies in Asia disintegrated.

John B. Judis 34 **AUSTIN DIARIST | Organic Chemistry**

Books & the Arts

Stanley Kauffmann 20 **FILMS | Last Acts** *Downfall* offers a disquietingly sympathetic look at Hitler's last days.

Jennifer Homans 21 **DANCE | Swan Lake and Stalin** Ever since the Russian Revolution, the Kirov Ballet has been torn between imperial classics and Soviet innovations. To regain its position at the forefront of classical ballet, it must come to terms with its own tradition.

Frederick Seidel 25 **POEM** | *Drinking in the Daytime*

Ingrid D. Rowland 28 **Keeping Her Head** *Lucrezia Borgia: Life, Love and Death in Renaissance Italy* by Sarah Bradford

Alan Mintz 31 **Group Therapy** *Jews and the American Soul: Human Nature in the Twentieth Century* by Andrew R. Heinze

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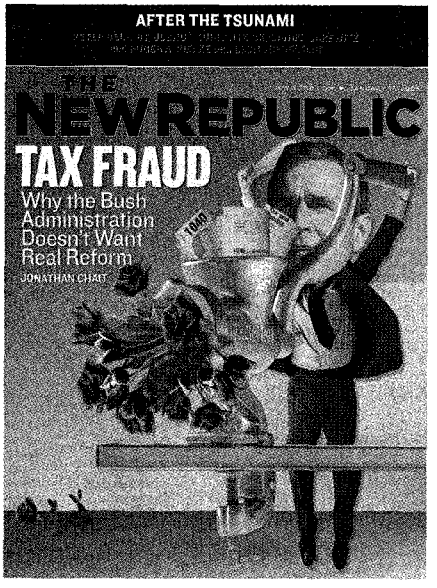
CORRESPONDENCE

FOUND IN TRANSLATION

WYATT MASON REFRAINS FROM judging whether the new English Proust published by Viking/Penguin is more successful than its great predecessor by C.K. Scott Moncrieff ("Swann's Ways," January 17). This is a shame, because your readers should know that the new *In Search of Lost Time* is a revelation. Proust will always be long, but now, in English, he's no longer painfully long-winded.

Mason notes that Moncrieff tended to add to Proust—for instance, to use two verbs or adjectives where Proust had used one. Mason does not, however, comment on the regrettable effect of this persistent duplication. Because Moncrieff's "amplifications" usually don't add to the sense of the original, his sentences are filled with hollow words. At times, Moncrieff's Proust appears to engage in redundancy merely to achieve a sing-song effect. At others, he elaborates to the point of obtuseness. Here's an example: In the Viking/Penguin edition, the narrator notes in passing that certain people abstain from new pleasures outside their worldly position because they are either lazy or feel a resigned sense of the obligation created by their social grandeur, in Lydia Davis's translation, "to remain attached to a certain mooring." This is a small, effortless, and allusive metaphor, the type of writing that shows the writer's confidence in his poetic ability and in his readers' intelligence. By contrast, Moncrieff takes pains to explain that such people "remain moored like house-boats to a particular point on the shore of life." There is a significant loss of elegance here. The new English Proust does away with Moncrieff's flabby surplusage. Proust is now more concentrated, analytical, and efficient. Our gratitude to Moncrieff and his revisers for their great achievement shouldn't deter us from recognizing that the Viking/Penguin translation is a great improvement. Mason's review also failed to mention an outrage: The final three volumes of the new translation aren't scheduled to be published in the United States until 2019, 2020, and 2022, respectively, due to copyright conflicts. It's absolutely ridiculous that the parties haven't worked out some compromise to



give American readers easy access to these important books now.

CHRISTOPHER C. MURRAY
Chicago, Illinois

WYATT MASON RESPONDS:
If I refrained from judging the translation, it is because the central point of my 7,000-word essay is the very one that seems to elude Christopher C. Murray: New translations of classic works should not be measured on the basis of comparative criteria. The question to ask is not whether a new translation is better, but rather if it is useful. In lieu of another 7,000 words, the answer, in this instance, is yes. Murray is correct that Viking won't be bringing out the last three books on our soil for a good long while—due to that cuckoo-bananas notion called copyright. He is wrong, however, that American readers don't have easy access to them. Anyone who shares Murray's horror of "flabby surplusage" can buy all three—in hardback, paperback, or nifty boxed-set versions—at amazon.co.uk, just a few outrageous points and clicks away.

CHILD PROOF

IT IS FLABBERGASTING TO READ Daniel Jonah Goldhagen refer to an authentic Italian-language directive we know to be written in 1946 by the Vatican's Monsignor Domenico Tardini to Papal Nuncio Roncalli (later Pope John XXIII) as "ambiguous and inconclusive," while treating an unsigned memo written nearly a month later in French by God knows who as a definitive smoking gun ("Hide and Seek," January 31). That is not historiography; it is tendentious flim-flam. The original, authoritative Tardini document directs that Jewish children sheltered by Catholic institutions during World War II be returned to their original families.

THOMAS MCARDLE
Director of Communications
Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights
New York, New York

DANIEL JONAH GOLDHAGEN RESPONDS:
Why doesn't Thomas McArdle respond to the broad evidence of Church policy and practice of kidnapping Jewish children? Tardini's document actually says: First, don't respond to the Grand Rabbi of France's request for Jewish children's return; second, if response is necessary, don't do it in writing, because it will be used against the Church; third, don't return baptized children to Jewish institutions. It only suggests that *unbaptized* children might be returned to relatives. It does not say that *baptized* children must be returned. The French Church document details the fuller Church policy "approved by the Holy Father," including that baptized Jewish children should not be returned to parents. ■

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Those "Palestinian Refugees"

Who are they, what is the real story?

The major and perhaps only sticking point in negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians is that of the "return of the Palestinian refugees." It sank the Camp David conference that President Clinton had arranged, even though Mr. Barak had made unprecedented concessions for the sake of peace. The new man, Mahmoud Abbas, who routinely refers to Israel as the "Zionist enemy," also insists that the "right of return" is not negotiable, and that there can be no peace unless those "refugees" are allowed to "return" to Israel.

What are the facts?

650,000 "refugees" swell to 5 million. You have heard about those "Palestinian refugees," who claim "right of return" to Israel. Of course, virtually none of them ever lived in Israel -- they are the children and mostly grandchildren of those who fled in 1948. The total number of those who fled in 1948 is estimated to have been about 650,000. Now the number who wish to return has swollen to almost five million!

How did this exodus come about? In 1948, on the day of the proclamation of the State of Israel, five Arab armies invaded the new country from all sides. In frightful radio broadcasts, they urged the Arabs living there to leave, so that the invading armies could operate without interference. They could return after the expected quick victory in that "holy war," get their property back — and that of the Jews. Things turned out differently. The invading armies were defeated. Those who had left became refugees — people without a country. Those who stayed, and their children, are full-fledged citizens of the State of Israel.

> "The Arabs are committed not to allow any 'non-believers' to be in control of any part of the Middle East. That is the real cause of the 'Palestinian refugee problem.'"

These so-called "Palestinian refugees" have not been allowed to settle in the "indivisible Arab nation." They have been supported in camps since 1948. So far, over $2.0 billion has been spent on their maintenance. No end is in sight. Who pays for that? You guessed it: Through UNWRA Relief, the United States contributes more than 60% of the total cost.

The Arab countries, among them some of the richest in the world, who fritter away their enormous fortunes on frivolous luxuries, are satisfied to leave their Arab brethren in those miserable camps. They have never contributed a penny to their maintenance.

Another side of the "refugee" story. But there is another side to the "refugee" story. Little is heard of the 800,000 Jewish refugees from Arab countries, who fled those countries to settle in the newly formed Jewish State of Israel. Every one of these refugees was immediately accepted, resettled, taken care of, and given full citizenship by the fledgling, impoverished, and embattled Jewish State. There never has been, and there certainly is not now, a Jewish "refugee" camp in Israel or anywhere else.

The Arab "refugees" who fled Israel left little wealth and little history, since most of them had not come to "Palestine" until Jewish settlers opened economic opportunities in what had been a desolate country for centuries. But the Jews of Arab lands have a history going back thousands of years. When forced to flee, they left behind land, wealth, and a long history. They arrived in Israel, quite literally only "with their shirts on their backs." They now make up almost 60% of the vibrant and productive population of Israel. What have the Arabs, the richest people in the world, done with their "refugees" in more than 50 years? They have kept them in misery, on the dole of the world, and have taught their hopeless youth the "skills" of suicide missions and of slaughtering defenseless and unarmed men, women, and children.

If the Arab nations truly decided to make peace with Israel and to put an end to the century-long strife, they could easily accomplish it by accepting the "Palestinian refugees" in their countries and, just as Israel did with Jewish refugees from Arab countries, integrating them into their societies and making useful citizens of them. In fact, acceptance in their countries might also be offered to the Israeli Arabs, who, despite enjoying a higher standard of living, education, and health than Arabs in any of the surrounding countries and despite having the same civil rights as Israeli Jews, are not happy to live in a Jewish state.

Population transfers are common, especially in the wake of wars. They have been practiced throughout history. In 1923, Greece and Turkey agreed to the resettlement of 2 million Greeks and 800,000 Turks; in 1945, the resettlement of 3 million Germans from Poland and Czechoslovakia was arranged. Following the collapse of its North African Empire, France accepted close to 1.5 million people. More than 12 million(!) Muslims and Hindus were exchanged between India and Pakistan. Israel has recognized this historical necessity. The "Arab Nation," with its enormous wealth and vast under-populated lands, has stubbornly refused to face facts.

It is clear that the "Palestinian refugee problem" is a red herring, kept alive by the Arab nations for their political purposes, and with cynical disregard for the great number of impoverished people who live in these camps. It is being kept alive and is being used as a "non-negotiable" bargaining chip, for the purpose of destroying the State of Israel — a feat that the Arabs have attempted several times by military means, but which has always ended in disastrous failure. Apart from the unsolvable social problems it would create, the introduction of, say, even one-half of the 5 million who claim to be "refugees" would, with one stroke, dramatically alter the demographic makeup of the country and would inevitably destroy the Jewish State. That is of course the whole idea behind the demand for the "return of the refugees". If the Arab nations were willing to solve the "refugee problem," the legitimacy of Israel could no longer be questioned. But that is not acceptable to the Arabs. They are firmly committed not to allow Israel or any "non-believers" to be in control of any part of the Middle East. It is that, and that alone, which is the real cause of the "Palestinian refugee problem."

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A Little Trim

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FROM ANN ARBOR

REPUBLICANS COMPLAIN that they are unfairly caricatured as heartless corporate lobbyists who get their jollies yanking health insurance away from little old ladies in wheelchairs. Fine, I say. So how do they explain Haley Barbour?

Most of Washington remembers Barbour as the former Republican Party chairman and a consummate K Street insider. But lately, Barbour has been gaining a different sort of notoriety in Mississippi, where he became governor in 2004. Mississippi is struggling to afford Medicaid, the joint federal-state program that provides health insurance for the poor, because rising medical costs and swelling enrollments have made it so expensive. Last year, Barbour came up with a crude, if effective, solution: Cut from the rolls 50,000 people who live at or near the poverty line.

When critics protested that the cuts would expose these people to substantial new medical bills, Barbour insisted the new Medicare drug benefit would take care of them—even though Medicare's benefit, which is less comprehensive, won't even start until 2006. Then Barbour began ranting about Medicaid fraud. "I'm not going to make people who work two and three and four jobs to support their families and pay their taxes have to pay for people to get free health care who could work but choose not to." But the people Barbour was ousting from Medicaid weren't lazy; they were part of Mississippi's PLAD program, as in "Poverty Level Aged and Disabled," meaning age or disability keeps them from working. Soon Barbour got a lesson in the difference between Washington, where budget cuts look like numbers on a spreadsheet, and state capitals, where budget cuts look like your neighbor's elderly aunt. After legislators passed Barbour's proposal, they came home to crowds of irate constituents.

Now those lawmakers are scrambling to undo the cuts, and Barbour has agreed to consider alternatives. But he has already ruled out raising taxes to close the program's funding gap; the former tobacco lobbyist is particularly unhappy about a proposed 50-cent levy on cigarette packs. That means significant Medicaid cuts loom no matter what the legislature concocts. One measure under discussion would reduce the yearly limits on Medicaid coverage from seven prescriptions to five and from 30 days of hospitalization to 15. It's still more than adequate—unless you happen to get really sick.

Barbour is hardly the first governor to try to reduce the flow of money into Medicaid. In fact, it's a gubernatorial tradition that reaches across party lines and renews itself every time a recession tightens state budgets. When the Democrats controlled Congress or the White House, however, they usually blocked such efforts because they believed in preserving Medicaid as an entitlement that would grow with the population's needs. Even as the program got more expensive, they did their best to have the federal government contribute its share of dollars. Then they pushed states to do the same.

Today, Washington is under different management. In 2003, President Bush showed some of his famous compassionate conservatism by ripping a page from Newt Gingrich's "Contract With America" and proposing to turn Medicaid into a block grant, thereby putting a lid on the federal government's contribution. The initiative failed, as even Republican governors had qualms about it. But, this week, Bush revealed in his new budget proposal that he still expects to extract tens of billions of dollars from the program over the next few years. Most of these savings will allegedly come from eliminating waste, which sounds easy enough, until you realize that Medicaid already pays doctors and hospitals less than either Medicare or private insurance. Most likely, states will be hard-pressed to comply with Bush's budget goals without cutting people or benefits.

And that seems to be the whole point. Bush's new secretary of health and human services is Mike Leavitt, the former governor of Utah, whose claim to fame was a rather creative restructuring of that state's Medicaid program in 2002. Leavitt reduced benefits for one group of beneficiaries, then used the savings to offer uninsured residents deeply discounted "insurance" that covers doctor visits but not hospitalization. (Coming soon: car insurance that doesn't cover collisions.) The entirely predictable result of this so-called expansion was to contract the basic Medicaid benefit package. Last week, Leavitt announced that the federal government should allow more states similar "flexibility"; as secretary, he's in a position to grant it unilaterally. Translation: If governors want to dilute their Medicaid programs on his watch, he won't stop them.

This isn't to say the pressure Medicaid places on government finances isn't severe. Today, Medicaid costs the federal and state governments more than three times what it did in 1990, thanks in part to expansions in the program that were made while the booming economy of the '90s boosted tax revenue. That money is gone now, warranting such belt-tightening measures as higher co-payments for the non-destitute. But such reforms can yield only modest savings; the real reason Medicaid keeps getting more expensive is that more and more people need it. Employer-provided health insurance is ever more difficult to find; affordable long-term care for the elderly virtually impossible. Medicaid is nobody's ideal solution to these problems. (Ideal solutions are a discussion for another day.) But, for all of its flaws, it's the most cost-effective option on the mainstream political agenda, according to research by Massachusetts Institute of Technology economist Jonathan Gruber.

Think of it this way: If Medicaid hadn't grown to fill the yawning gaps in private coverage over the last decade, today we would probably have 50 million uninsured Americans instead of 45 million. Conservative Republicans can't abide expanding Medicaid in part because bigger government eventually means more taxes and, heavens, we can't have that. But rolling back Medicaid means the poor and disabled will have to confront medical bills alone. The bankruptcies will pile up, emergency rooms will get even more crowded, and, yes, some people will die. Bush, Leavitt, and Barbour may find those consequences acceptable. But then they really can't complain when people call them heartless.

JONATHAN COHN

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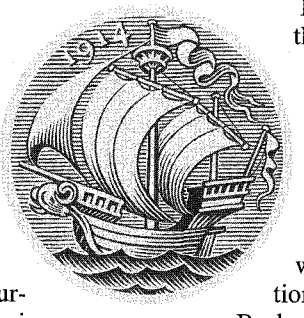
Empty Trough

PRESIDENT BUSH IS, if nothing else, consistent. Every January or February, the White House trots out an audacious plan that heartens liberals, angers entrenched political interests, engenders a national debate—and ultimately goes nowhere. Two years ago, it was the AIDS funding initiative, which promised billions to Africa but was soon forgotten in the rush to war with Iraq. Last year, it was Bush's refreshingly radical—if flawed—plan to reform immigration policy, which has yet to be implemented.

Which is why we greet Bush's plan to cap agriculture subsidies with a heavy dose of skepticism. Such subsidies—generous payments to farmers intended to offset market fluctuations—have long been the bane of free-traders and deficit hawks. And with good reason: There's no market rationale for privileging one sector of the U.S. economy over another, and such protectionist behavior only undermines efforts to open foreign economies to U.S. goods. Under the current subsidy regime—which Bush augmented by $83 billion over ten years with his 2002 farm bill—American farmers get annual checks for up to $360,000, though the system is so riddled with loopholes that many clear $1 million each year. Bush's new plan would reduce payments by a modest 5 percent, though it would also set a strict $250,000 payout cap and close most of the program's loopholes.

The plan came out of nowhere; though the farm lobby got wind of the impending proposal last week, it was preceded by no widespread call for reform, no impending crisis, no congressional debate. Nor was there the usual folksy p.r. rollout of town-hall meetings and Midwestern stump speeches so typical of Bush's major initiatives, such as Social Security privatization. All of which suggests that the president is taking the idea none too seriously.

Indeed, for every reason why agriculture subsidies should be reduced, there seems to be an equally compelling reason why they won't be. Most obvious is the intense opposition that the mere suggestion of cuts raises on Capitol Hill. Well before Bush submitted his 2006 budget, some 100 farm groups sent newly seated Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns a preemptive letter opposing subsidy cuts, which Southern and Midwestern congressmen—largely Republicans—quickly turned into sound bites against Bush's plan. Former Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Thad Cochran, a Mississippi Republican, vowed to "work as hard as I can to oppose any changes" in subsidy limits, a sentiment echoed by many of his farm-state colleagues. This is hardly surprising: Anything less than vigorous protection of agricultural pork will lose them the support of a lobby long central to their political survival.



Such cuts are especially unlikely this year. After all, it's not as if Bush's budget is otherwise uncontroversial. It calls for slashing more than 150 domestic programs, including significant cuts to housing, food stamps, Amtrak, and education, even as it calls for reopening a program on next-generation nuclear weapons. Moreover, partial privatization of Social Security, Iraq, and possible tax reform are each in themselves enough to drain the president's political capital.

The enormity of Bush's 2005 agenda suggests that his proposal to cut farm subsidies is nothing more than a ploy to demonstrate his supposed seriousness about halving the deficit by proposing cuts he knows won't pass, thus allowing him to blame the legislative branch for skyrocketing spending. Bush pulled the same trick last year, pushing spending cuts only to stand by as Congress ignored each one, even as he continued to claim credit for proposing a deficit-conscious budget. The symbolic nature of the programs Bush has targeted lends credence to this explanation—they sound big, but cost little. Bush's plan to limit agriculture subsidies, for example, may have made a splash, but it would only save about $6 billion over ten years; altogether, Bush's 150 cuts would save a mere $20 billion—chump change compared with the projected $427 billion deficit in the upcoming fiscal year.

Interestingly, despite their protestations, Bush may be doing his congressional allies a favor. This way, in the 2006 midterms, they will be able to brag to their constituents about protecting local interests while avoiding accusations of overspending. And Bush gets to look courageous confronting his party and special interests at little cost to himself. True deficit reduction would mean rescinding the tax cuts, proposing responsible Social Security reform, or, God forbid, raising taxes to cover government expenses. But why reduce the deficit when you can just pretend to at a fraction of the political cost? ■

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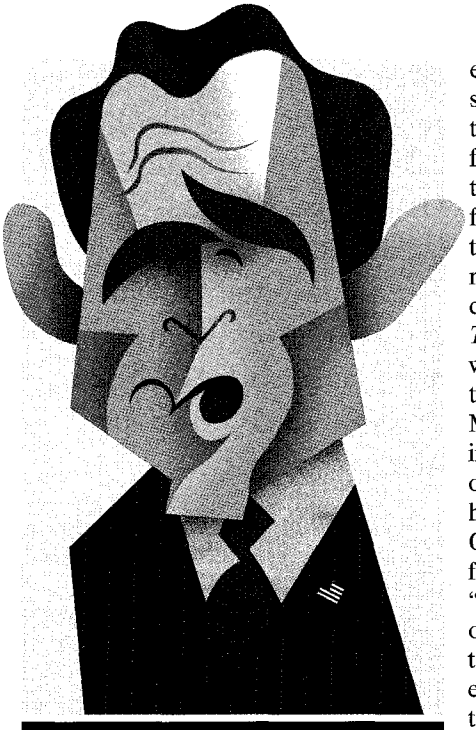
NOTEBOOK

BUSH TO REID: 'IT AIN'T ME, HARRY' . . . FEWER FIREHOUSES, NOT SO SCARY

IMPLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY

FOR THOSE WHO THINK OF THE president as a divisive fellow, perhaps a recent soiree thrown by George W. and Laura—for two Democratic senators, two Republican senators, and their spouses—might change their perception. That's when the president took Harry Reid, the Senate minority leader, aside to assure him that the White House had nothing to do with a 13-page attack on the senator that was released by the Republican National Committee (RNC) this week. The memo, studded with damning bullet points, calls Reid the "Chief Democrat Obstructionist" and accuses him of sins ranging from acting as a "Leading Senate Proponent of 'Hillarycare' " to "Call[ing a] DC Ritz-Carlton Condo [his] Home." (Among the shocking specifics: the Ritz offers "hotel-style amenities and concierge services to their residents.")

So Bush's hand-washing must have been reassuring to Reid. After all, what makes the senator think that the president would have anything to do with the Republican Party? And, as Bush would tell you, he's been cursed when it comes to taking out political rivals. Somehow, other people keep making sleazy attacks on his enemies without his knowledge or approval. First, Bush had to suffer the smearing of John McCain during the Republican primaries in 2000, when push-polls suggesting McCain had illegitimately fathered a black child (i.e., his adopted Bangladeshi daughter) helped eliminate him from the race. A dismayed Bush responded, "[If] anybody in my campaign has done that, they're going to be fired." (Frustratingly for Bush, no culprit was found.) Then Bush had to endure the slandering of John Kerry by the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, who put out ads suggesting that Kerry's reputation as a Vietnam hero was undeserved. After a few weeks of silent suffering, Bush condemned the ads—sort of:



George W. Bush

"I'm denouncing all the stuff being on TV of the 527s." (Mysteriously, they continued.) And now this—an assault on Harry Reid that must be driving Bush mad. How will he ever rein the RNC in?

NOT CHANGIN' WITH *THE TIMES*

"A WELCOME APPOINTMENT" IS HOW *The New York Times* headlined its editorial about Condoleezza Rice's designation of Lieutenant General William E. Ward as senior security coordinator between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, a new relationship formalized at Sharm El Sheik this week. But, even as it welcomed him, the *Times* displayed its churlish reflex toward everything the Bush administration does or does not do in the Middle East. The editorial observed that Ward "has zero political credentials" and caviled that he hasn't the panache or stature of former Senator George Mitchell or even retired General Anthony Zinni. Of course, these two plenipotentiaries were hardly models of success, having failed to bridge a single gap that separated the Israelis and the Palestinians. The same can be said for Bill Clinton, who had more pizzazz than even Henry Kissinger. Clinton failed because his strategic assumption—that the United States should squeeze Israel to cede whatever the Palestinians demanded—was wrong. In any case, the *Times*' criticism of Ward is baseless. He was commander of the NATO Stabilization Force between Orthodox Serbs and Muslims in Bosnia, brigade commander in Mogadishu, and a deputy director of operations in Afghanistan. Moreover, he was the Pentagon's chief of the Office of Military Cooperation in Cairo for two years. Rather than possessing "zero" political experience, Ward has oodles. (The *Times* also failed to mention that Ward is black, perpetuating the establishment media's habit of ignoring the Bush administration's stunning obliviousness to race, ethnicity, and gender in his appointments.)

What really obsesses the *Times* is its mendacious belief that Bush and Ariel Sharon have been in cahoots to prevent the emergence of a Palestinian state. In a shabby sleight of hand, the *Times* puts forward the notion that Ward's appointment might well be "a ploy to inoculate the president from complaints that America doesn't give a whit about whether the Palestinians ever get their own state." Then it suggests that Mahmoud Abbas "could well maneuver Mr. Sharon in a direction that Mr. Arafat couldn't get him to go: toward a real peace deal and a Palestinian state." Both lines suggest that Bush and Sharon have militated against a Palestinian state, when, in fact, it was Arafat who sustained and supported Palestinian terrorism and succored the delusion that Palestinian violence would drive the Israelis out of the territories. Because they recognized that Arafat was an insurmountable obstacle—to the disdain of the United Nations, the Europeans, and the

DAVID COWLES

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Times—Bush and Sharon waited for him to die. It seems to have worked.

FALSE ALARM

OF ALL THE CUTS CONTAINED IN George W. Bush's new budget, few are as provocative as his proposal to slash $215 million from a federal program that equips and trains local fire departments around the country. The International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) wasted no time in decrying this cut. And politically, at least, this move does seem like madness. Is there a more heroic post–September 11 figure than the firefighter? A cynic might suspect craven payback: IAFF President Harold Schaitberger, after all, was a key backer of John Kerry's presidential campaign. But Bush's proposal is perfectly sensible policy. You wouldn't believe it from listening to Democrats like Kerry, who last year called for 100,000 new firefighters in America, but we don't need firefighters as much as we once did. Building fires have plummeted in recent years—down nearly 50 percent from 1977 to 2002. Thankfully, improved building codes and increased reliance on smoke detectors and sprinkler systems have all made big blazes rare. Yes, there are still nearly 1.7 million fires per year in the United States; but we also have nearly a million firemen to fight them. Given these statistics, it may not actually be so crazy to "[open] firehouses in Baghdad while closing them in Brooklyn," as Democrats like to say.

It's certainly true that fire departments in high-risk urban areas need to be ready for the potential catastrophe of a WMD attack. But that doesn't necessarily mean pouring more money into nationwide grant programs like the one Bush is cutting. It makes more sense for Congress to better target homeland security spending—and stop wasting it in places like Wyoming and Alaska. To those who insist that America needs thousands more firefighters, we say, "Pants on fire!" ■

TNR.commentary

'IRAQ'D

SPENCER ACKERMAN

SO WHAT DOES "REACHING OUT" REALLY MEAN?: While leading Shia figures—such as Adel Abdel Mehdi, reportedly a favorite of the United Iraqi Alliance to become prime minister—have repeatedly pledged to work toward reconciliation with the Sunnis, some early indications suggest that they're ruling out potentially promising avenues for healing sectarian divides.

Chief among them is de-Baathification. One of L. Paul Bremer's most controversial decisions as head of the Coalition Provisional Authority was to ban tens of thousands of Baath Party members from serving in government. Unfortunately, this contributed both to the insurgency and to the broader sense that Sunnis have no future in the U.S.-backed political process. After Bremer returned home, Iyad Allawi, extremely concerned about Sunni alienation from the process, tried to relax de-Baathification. But now, the Alliance is talking about reversing Allawi and intensifying de-Baathification. *The Washington Post* quotes a senior de-Baathification official and member of the Alliance-aligned Dawa Party:

> The society will not be stable in Iraq until we purify the government of former Baathists. We have information the Baathists and some former members of the regime have returned to their jobs and are leading the insurgency in the country. The security forces of the government are infiltrated.

With a material inducement for Sunnis to join the process apparently off the table, there remains one oft-discussed prospect for bringing the Sunnis into the fold: appointing Sunnis to major cabinet posts or reserving a position on the presidency council for a prominent Sunni. But, absent a broader move responding to legitimate grievances from the Sunni population, appointments like this often serve to remove the appointee from the mainstream of Sunni sentiment instead of bringing mainstream Sunni sentiment toward the appointee. After all, Ghazi Al Yawar, a Sunni, has served as interim Iraqi president since June, but that hasn't prevented Sunni alienation from deepening. And, without these broader moves toward rapprochement, Sunnis might be involved in drafting the constitution, but not necessarily in a constructive way. We won't know for a few days who won the election, let alone what they'll actually do in office. But the question remains: What do Shia promises to reach out to the Sunnis really mean?

&c.

NOAM SCHEIBER

MORE ON THAT DEFINITION OF "DECADE": Recently, I have kvetched about the administration's deliberately misleading habit of claiming Social Security privatization will only cost $754 billion over the next decade, when it will cost well over $1 trillion during the first decade of the program. (The discrepancy arises because privatization wouldn't start until 2009, and, even then, it would only be phased in gradually. So "next decade" doesn't mean the same as "first decade of the program." Obviously, it's the latter number that matters.)

Anyone who doesn't understand the consequences of allowing the White House to get away with this kind of diversionary tactic need only consult a story on the front page of Wednesday's *Post*. It turns out that the Medicare "reform" bill Congress passed in 2003 isn't going to cost $400 billion over a decade, as the White House initially suggested, or even $534 billion, as it already knew (and deliberately concealed from the public), but $1.2 *trillion*. What happened? Well, it turns out it was the same trick the White House is using with Social Security today: The lower estimates referred to the years 2004 through 2013, during which time the cost of the program would be low because it wouldn't kick in until 2006, and even then it would be phased in slowly. Obviously, the relevant number here is the cost of the program once it's fully up and running, which is where the $1.2 trillion figure comes from.

The only satisfaction you can take from this fiasco is that it has given Democrats some great opportunities to slap administration officials around. My favorite was Rahm Emanuel's shot at Treasury Secretary John Snow at a recent congressional hearing, when he mocked the administration's claim that Social Security faces a crisis. Here's how the *Post* reported it:

> "If you're looking for a crisis, I would suggest you look at a crisis that was self-made in just last year, because the crisis exists in what's happened to Medicare by weighing it down," Emanuel said. "Those of us who told you it was going to cost twice as much were right."

This should not let up.

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Amsterdam Dispatch

Going to Pot

BY OLIVER BURKEMAN

"THERE IS A great illness in Holland today," Abdou Menebhi says, smoking a cigarette in a dark, wood-paneled bar in the shadow of the old Heineken brewery in south Amsterdam. "Everyone is afraid now. And fear will not always remain fear. It can explode, even over the smallest incident."

Urbane, secular, left-wing, and cosmopolitan—he is married to a British woman—Menebhi seems, at first, like a walking advertisement for the Netherlands, Europe's supposed bastion of diversity and tolerance. But he doesn't feel that way. "Every day, you're fighting," says Menebhi, the chairman of the Moroccan Council of Amsterdam, who moved here from his native country three decades ago. "It's hard to feel at home."

This is not how people are supposed to talk in Holland. The uniquely Dutch concept of *gedogen*—which translates roughly as "live and let live"—has traditionally encompassed every sphere of life here: not just ethnic differences, but moral ones too, including euthanasia, abortion, and, most famously, drugs and sex. (Holland is surely the only country in the world where official tourist maps helpfully indicate the locations of brothels.)

In Europe's most densely populated state, co-existence was a necessity of life. But everything changed, Menebhi says, last November, when the prominent and flamboyantly controversial Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh was gunned down on an Amsterdam street. Van Gogh's throat was then slit with two butchers' knives, which his killer used to pin a note to his body. It explained that the attack was revenge for van Gogh's vociferous criticism of Muslims; he had labeled Muslims "goat-fuckers" and accused them of "medieval backwardness." In a film van Gogh had just finished making with the Dutch-Somalian member of parliament Ayaan Hirsi Ali—who fled a forced marriage and describes herself as an "ex-Muslim"—verses of the Koran were projected onto a near-naked female body. Following the murder, police arrested Mohammed Bouyeri, a Dutch-Moroccan described by the authorities as an Islamic fundamentalist.

But the violence was only beginning. A vicious backlash immediately flared against Holland's Muslims, who make up 6 percent of the population (more in the big cities): Arsonists attacked mosques and destroyed an Islamic school while hard-line politicians promised harsh anti-immigration measures. And, now that the flames have subsided, a vastly altered Holland is emerging. Theo van Gogh and his killer both believed that there is an utterly irreconcilable clash between Islam and the West. But the true lesson of his murder, for a continent beset by ever fiercer debates on immigration, is that Dutch "tolerance"—just looking the other way and minding your own business, as the Dutch had done for decades—is an insufficient answer to the question of how to nurture immigrant communities while keeping extremism under control. In fact, *gedogen* may have had precisely the opposite effect.

"THEO ALWAYS SAID, 'What would be the point in killing me?' " said Theodore Holman, van Gogh's closest friend, padding in sneakers around the offices of Column Productions, a film studio that they jointly ran. "I think perhaps he realized he might be in danger, but he somehow couldn't imagine it." Holman, a vigorous supporter of his friend's clash-of-civilizations thesis, believes Dutch tolerance has stopped working. "It worked for quite a long time," he said. "It worked with the Jews, when they came in the sixteenth century. It worked with the Protestants. ... But now we come to a point where it doesn't work, because [Muslims] want to form an Islamic society. Unlike the Jews and the Protestants, they are not so glad to be here in Holland."

But others believe the explanation is far more complex. The traditional Dutch approach to tolerance, it seems, had never really involved an active embrace of difference. Instead, it was a studied ignorance, a striving for consensus at all costs that was best summed up to me by Hendrik, a taxi driver. "Don't think we like it," he said of Holland's diversity of lifestyles. "We just look at it like this." He spread the fingers of his right hand and held them in front of his eyes.

When it came to Muslim immigration, *gedogen* often turned out to mean simply providing money—for religious schools and even for the salaries of some imams—without facilitating political engagement and a sense of belonging. "Dutch policies created the apartness of the communities," says Menebhi. "They didn't have any problem with money coming in from the Gulf States. They just let it happen, even though we signaled the danger of this process. Meanwhile, they ended Arabic lessons in normal schools, so people went to the religious schools instead. There was no place for diversity."

In fact, the sense that Dutch immigration policies had been creating cleavages and conflict in the Netherlands—rather than successful assimilation—was evident at least as far back as 1972, when race riots followed the arrival of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants. In 2002, 46 percent of 18- to 30-year-olds polled by a Dutch newspaper said they favored zero Muslim immigration, and, by 2003, the city of Rotterdam was floating plans to ban poor immigrants from moving to the city.

Paul Scheffer, a sociology professor at Amsterdam University, made his diagnosis of the problem as far back as 1999. "None of the unspoken expectations, such as the idea

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that integration was simply a matter of time, have turned out to be right," he wrote then. "So the house of cards known as multiculturalism collapses." Since the late '90s, a rising anti-immigration sentiment has only fueled tensions and Muslims' feelings of alienation. Immigration policies were tightened—making it harder, for example, for Muslim families to follow their breadwinners to Holland—and growing fears fueled the rise of Pim Fortuyn, the anti-immigration politician whom van Gogh admired and who was also murdered, though by an animal rights extremist, in 2002.

None of that, of course, reduces the responsibility of Theo van Gogh's killer for his act, but it goes some way to explaining how an individual murder could have shaken an entire society. "Hate is spreading across this country like a firestorm," one Dutch newspaper recently warned, calling on Queen Beatrix to address the nation. "Mosques, churches, and schools are being attacked. The Netherlands risks turning into a country of us and them, a country under the rule of fear."

AMSTERDAM'S STREETS TODAY feel relatively relaxed—including in Jan Hanzenstraat, a heavily Moroccan suburb where an unassuming gray brick building turns out to be the El Tawheed Mosque, where Mohammed Bouyeri studied and reportedly imbibed fundamentalist views. None of the young bearded men leaving the building would talk. Only one local boy, Nassem, volunteered an opinion on van Gogh's death. "He knew he was saying dangerous things," Nassem said.

Menebhi calls this atmosphere a "provisional calm," and the pessimism on every side of the debate in Holland would appear to justify his caution. Ayaan Hirsi Ali provided a brief counterpoint to that sentiment, though, when she reemerged from hiding at the end of January to take up her position in the Dutch parliament. "I am scared now and again, but I will go on," she told reporters. "I must go on."

It is a sad irony that the Linnaeusstraat, where Theo van Gogh was attacked as he bicycled to work, feels every bit like a normal neighborhood, with its kaleidoscopic diversity. Moroccan cafés and Islamic butchers jostle for space with old-fashioned Dutch cheese shops, Indian restaurants, and general stores. What is unclear is whether such happy co-existence will come to be seen as the shape of Europe's future, or just a relic of its past. ■

Agree?
Disagree?
Got something to add?
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Thai breakdown.

Paradise Lost

BY JOSHUA KURLANTZICK

PATTANI, THAILAND

IN THE WITHERING tropical heat, the troops positioned everywhere on the streets of this small city attend to their tasks slowly but resolutely. Draped off the back of jeeps, hundreds of young soldiers in black jumpsuits and flak jackets, carrying assault rifles across their chests, blanket the town. They erect roadblocks on main streets, stopping pedestrians to rummage through their papers. From platforms equipped with heavy machine guns, they monitor intersections.

In the face of the heavy security presence, few locals linger. In the center of town, local lawyers travel in groups so, if one is detained, the others can bear witness. "Many teachers are afraid to even sleep in their own bed," says Abdul Rahman Abdul Saham, head of a local Islamic school. "At night, the police and the army try to attack them."

Over the past year, the town of Pattani and the surrounding three provinces in southern Thailand have been wracked by a wave of bloodshed stemming from an insurgency and the resulting army crackdown. Some 500 people have been killed. Nearly every day, schoolteachers, religious leaders, police, and local officials are shot, knifed, or bombed—or just disappear.

Yet this isn't Pakistan or Indonesia, countries that bring to mind images of lawlessness and terrorism. Pattani is only a few hours south of the swank islands frequented by millions of tourists in the pre-tsunami days, and Thailand, which contains six million Muslims among a population of 60 million mostly Buddhist Thais, was once regarded as one of the most peaceful nations in Asia. Yet, since his initial election as prime minister four years ago, the charismatic Thai leader, Thaksin Shinawatra, has launched policies toward the south that have helped transform local grievances into a full-blown insurgency, pushing southern Thailand into near-anarchy. And, unfortunately, Thaksin's disastrous strategies are hardly unique. They have become common practice among America's Asian allies in the war on terrorism.

AN INDEPENDENT SULTANATE until 1902, Thailand's south always retained some stirrings of separatism. In the 1970s, militant separatist groups, such as the Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO) pushed for an independent southern state. Still, these fighters, while Muslim, tended to stress independence more than religion. "The separatists in the past were mostly [southern] nationalists not taking on the Islamic mantle," says Kevin Hewison, an expert on Thai

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politics at City University of Hong Kong.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Thai government launched new policies that tamped down separatism. Bangkok allowed greater federalism, creating the Civilian Police Military Command, also known as "the board," to give southerners more say in policy-making and to limit the power of the military, which had committed massive human rights abuses. "Before, with the board, the army's role in the south was clearer. ... There were some controls," says Aran Pancharoen, head of Thailand's Muslim Lawyers Club. Meanwhile, the government passed a reformist constitution in 1997 that established human rights watchdogs. The strategies worked. By the '90s, the south was relatively quiet and PULO had largely given up its arms.

But, in the late '90s, Thailand was wracked by financial crisis. The ruling Democrat Party took painful measures to end the crisis, but the moves hurt the Democrats' popularity. Thaksin, a police officer who used political connections to build a telecommunications empire, saw an opening. He formed a new party called Thai Rak Thai and promised populist policies. Combined with Thaksin's personal charisma, these policies proved popular, and Thaksin swept the January 2001 elections.

From early on, Thaksin demonstrated authoritarian tendencies soon exacerbated by the war on terrorism. He forced independent bureaucrats to resign, replacing them with family members. He tried to rewrite the constitution to remove checks on his power and he intimidated local journalists. "Thaksin's deputy is always calling here to the editor each time we print something they don't like," one journalist at *The Bangkok Post*, a local newspaper, told me.

After September 11, Thaksin apparently sensed an opportunity to consolidate his gains. He capitalized on newfound fear of terrorism, perhaps figuring that the United States would not censure him if he rolled back democratic freedoms. "The government is playing on [Thais'] fear," says one Thai human rights activist. After all, several terrorism experts say, Washington needs the support of Bangkok, since Thailand has become a major hub for terrorism financing and planning. The United States has pushed the Thais to open a joint counterterrorism center in Bangkok and to crack down on terrorist groups' financial networks.

Knowing the United States was unlikely to object, Thaksin stepped up his efforts to recentralize power. In 2002, he eliminated "the board." He unleashed violence on anyone who doubted him, ordering wars on drugs in which security forces were allowed to shoot anyone they said was involved in narcotics. Over the past two years, more than 2,500 people have been killed. Government critics and NGO workers, including many in the south, have started vanishing. "People follow me everywhere, and they come up to me and tell me, 'If you want to live in peace, don't take cases [of people who disappeared],' " says Niraman Sulaiman, a Pattani lawyer.

Yet, even as Thaksin consolidated control, Washington said little, though, in private, Thailand specialists at the State Department recognized Thaksin's abuses. Thailand was offered a free-trade agreement, and the United States continued pushing the Thais on military basing rights and counterterrorism cooperation. "When I brief U.S. diplomats in Bangkok," says one leading human rights activist, "they care only about security concerns."

While Thaksin has centralized control, he has increasingly relied upon Thailand's most illiberal actors for political survival. He has absorbed provincial bosses who opposed democratization in the '90s into his coalition; in return, he has rewarded them with key cabinet positions.

Though the south was known for religious moderation, in the wake of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, some southern Thai Muslims became radicalized. "[Young Thais] learn what's happening in the Middle East; they're becoming more religious," says Mansour Salleh, a local political leader. Meanwhile, Zachary Abuza, an expert on Southeast Asian terrorism, argues that radical groups like Jemaah Islamiah have begun to target southern Thailand. Still, until recently, this extremism was limited. "The links between southern Thai radicals and international terrorist groups were very small, informal," says one consultant to Thailand's National Security Council.

But in January 2004, insurgents raided an army camp in the province of Narathiwat, killing four soldiers. With no one to stop him—not the neutered press, not the flunky bureaucrats, not southern officials, who no longer had much power—Thaksin could respond however he wanted. And the security forces were happy to oblige. Police and military units, southern residents say, began pulling people from their homes and torturing them. "People in my village are arrested by the army for interrogation," says Hama, a community radio activist. "When they are sent home, they have broken ribs, bruises all over their bodies." In late April, after a group of radicals allegedly attacked government targets, security forces killed over 100 of the men; TV footage suggested that many killed were innocents shot as they fled the area. Thaksin responded with even tougher measures, trying to rally Buddhist sentiment against Muslim southerners. "The government plays on fear [of terrorism] and ... [a fear] that the country [can] be divided," says one human rights activist.

The bloodshed, and Thaksin's comments, only pushed moderates into the extremists' camp. Mosque attendance has risen, locals say, and *The Washington Post* reported that southern Muslims who die at the hands of police are not bathed before the funeral—a sign that they are regarded as martyrs. "Special Branch [Thai elite intelligence] can't find many sources of funding for attacks in the south, maybe because so many of the attacks are self-supporting suicide bombers," says Mansour. And, over the next six months, terrorism became an everyday occurrence here. Teachers and monks and local officials had their throats slit. Schools were burned to the ground.

Yet Thaksin refused to consider reinstituting federalism or strengthening independent watchdogs. He blamed the suffocations on Ramadan, saying protesters were weak from

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fasting. He arranged, bizarrely, for millions of origami cranes to be dropped by plane over the south, supposedly to show southern Muslims that Thailand cares about them. More dangerously, Thaksin suggested instituting a version of Malaysia and Singapore's draconian Internal Security Acts (ISA), which permit police to detain suspects indefinitely.

None of this seems to have changed Washington's view. The U.S.-Thai free-trade agreement is still in the works, and Washington has welcomed Thailand's contributions to the Iraq war. "If the U.S. said to Thaksin, 'No, let's reconsider these trade and economic deals,' that would show Thaksin the U.S. cares about human rights, and he might listen," says one Thai specialist on the south. Instead, as *The Washington Post* recently paraphrased the comments of a senior State Department official, "The bottom line is that Thailand has supported the invasion of Iraq, including providing troops for humanitarian tasks, and has been helpful in the war on terrorism."

THAILAND'S MELTDOWN, THOUGH dramatic, is not unique. Across Asia, pseudo-authoritarian leaders have taken advantage of the war on terrorism to consolidate their power, undermining the federalism and liberalization that took hold across the region in the '90s. In Singapore, the government has continued its ISA, no longer fearful of U.S. criticism, though rights groups charge that Singapore's long-ruling People's Action Party uses coercion to dominate elections. The United States, meanwhile, has increased counterterrorism cooperation with Singaporean intelligence. In the Philippines, where, since September 11, the United States has sent over 1,000 American troops and hundreds of millions of dollars in military aid, Manila has gone on the offensive against southern militants. At the same time, as *The New York Times* recently reported, the Philippine security forces, enjoying freer rein, have been shutting down radio stations, TV stations, and newsrooms across the country.

In Pakistan and Uzbekistan, which have also grown closer to Washington since September 11—Pakistan was declared a "major non-NATO ally," an honor accorded to Thailand as well—leaders have stepped up security crackdowns and used force against democratic, if flawed, opponents. The crackdowns have driven many of these opponents into exile or underground. Meanwhile, in Nepal, the ruling royal family has portrayed its struggle against ruthless Maoist insurgents—a local battle with serious repercussions for the future of the country but no links to outside forces—as part of the global war on terrorism. In response, the White House has authorized new U.S. military aid to Nepal; the Nepalese king last week declared martial law and dissolved the remnants of the country's democracy.

As in Thailand, where Thaksin has relied on local political bosses for support, pseudo-autocrats across Asia often have made alliances with the most illiberal elements of society to maintain their power. Last year, Pakistan's Pervez Musharraf made a devil's bargain with hard-line Islamic parties to extend his term. In return for their support, Pakistan's Islamic parties have gained increased influence in Northwest Frontier Province, where Islamists have installed elements of *sharia* law. Before the tsunami, Jakarta allowed the army to extend a state of emergency in the restive province of Aceh, where the military has engaged in a scorched-earth campaign against a Muslim rebel group—a campaign that has further radicalized many Acehnese.

And, as in Thailand, Pakistan, or the Philippines, these policies often hurt the battle against terrorism. As Thaksin shows, authoritarian leaders unwilling to take any counsel frequently descend into unwise policies, since no advisers will tell them they are wrong. What's more, these alliances with illiberal groups ultimately undermine the kind of indigenous democratization vital to winning a global ideological war. The rollback of freedoms convinces Muslims, whether in Peshawar or Pattani, that they cannot obtain change through the political process. "The young people [in southern Thailand] think they have no say, so they start organizing underground, in radical groups," says Mansour.

Meanwhile, human rights abuses undercut governments' moral authority. On a recent visit to the United States, Kraisak says he told National Security Council staffers, "If we don't stop these methods of punishing entire communities in the south, Thailand will actually become a less secure place, which the United States will not want. ... [Thaksin's] polices are actually creating more jihadists." In Aceh and the southern Philippines, meanwhile, reports by the International Crisis Group find that support for Islamic radicals has grown significantly in recent years.

Worse, the illiberal allies of Asian autocrats not only oppose democratization but also often actively aid the very institutions that breed terrorism. So, in Northwest Frontier Province, the Islamic parties now wield greater control over the madrasa system, which is churning out students who could be fertile soil for radicals. In the Philippines, where the government has relied upon the security forces to control the south of the country, the corrupt military has been caught arming Islamist rebels.

IN MANY OF these Asian nations, leaders now have all but eliminated elections—Musharraf, for example, rigged a Stalinist "referendum" on his rule in 2002. But some pseudo-autocrats still hold elections, albeit flawed ones, giving their people—and the United States—a chance to assess them. Uzbekistan recently went to the polls, though the election was deemed unfree by many international observers. Malaysia holds regular contests. And Thaksin faced the Thai voters on February 6.

Thaksin dominated the poll. Though his personal popularity fell last year, he has since capitalized on public support for the government in the wake of the tsunami; Thaksin refused to postpone the vote. Returned to power with a potentially broader mandate, Thaksin is free to unleash even harsher policies than those he has tried to date, worrying many Thai liberals. Washington should be worried too. ■

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The Security Council's role.

Off Target

BY JAMES TRAUB

IN EARLY 1995, American and British diplomats began to worry that the crippling sanctions the United Nations had imposed on Iraq five years earlier were becoming too unpopular to sustain. The sanctions were essential to keeping weapons inspectors in the country and preventing Saddam Hussein from importing war matériel; but they had also crippled the Iraqi economy, with GDP per capita dropping from $2,304 to $495 over the previous six years. Saddam had adroitly manipulated his people's suffering to undermine worldwide support for the sanctions regime. "There was a discussion about whether we could hold the sanctions in place," says a former official on President Clinton's National Security Council staff. "There was erosion for humanitarian reasons, and we were worried that Rolf Ekeus"—the head of UNSCOM, the U.N. body searching Iraq for chemical and biological weapons—"would say he had accounted for everything. The French and the Russians wanted to find the quickest way out of sanctions so they could start selling to the Iraqis." Thus was born the Oil-for-Food Programme, under which Saddam was allowed to sell oil to buy food and medical supplies, and which, over the last few months, has become a ten-ton millstone around the U.N.'s neck.

Several central truths have been lost in the ruckus over Oil-for-Food. One is that the program was devised by the administrations of Bill Clinton and John Major, not by the United Nations—not, that is, by international civil servants. Another is that the compromises that allowed Saddam to exploit the program were baked in from the start. In 1991, the U.N. Security Council had passed a resolution permitting Iraq to sell limited amounts of oil in exchange for food and medicine. But Saddam had balked; the system was to be controlled by the United Nations, and he would not accept a program he could not manipulate. Four years later, with the humanitarian crisis deepening and the sanctions themselves threatened, American and British negotiators agreed to let Saddam control the distribution of goods within the country and choose who would buy Iraqi oil. It was plain that the dictator would use the deal to line his own pockets and to try to evade the sanctions. According to Sir Jeremy Greenstock, then an official in the British Foreign Office and later his country's ambassador to the United Nations, "It was realized that a certain amount of misbehavior was going to happen on the Iraqi side if they were going to accept this. But the Iraqi government had to agree, or it wouldn't work."

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In other words, Oil-for-Food was a conscious act of diplomacy. And it was, on balance, a successful one: The program saved the sanctions, and the sanctions made possible the disarmament of Iraq. But it was also, inevitably, a mess; and the U.N.'s critics have seized upon the program as a mighty bludgeon with which to beat the institution silly. *New York Times* columnist William Safire melodramatically dubbed Oil-for-Food "the largest financial rip-off in history." Federal and state prosecutors, and House and Senate panels, are scrutinizing the program. And, last week, an investigative body appointed by U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and headed by Paul Volcker, the former chairman of the Federal Reserve, issued an interim report on the program. Volcker concluded that Benon Sevan, the U.N. official who managed Oil-for-Food, abused his position to benefit an oil trader and quite possibly himself. Volcker has not yet finished investigating many other aspects of the program, including the alleged involvement of Annan's son, Kojo. Volcker's 219-page report, however, contains no evidence of systemic fraud or corruption; even Sevan, who appears to have acted alone, has only $160,000 of income for which he has not adequately accounted.

But, if the institution the Volcker report describes is not fundamentally dishonest or out of control, as the right-wing lynch mob would have it, neither is it healthy. It is, if anything, an explicitly subservient body that has grown habituated to serving the interests and the whims of its member-states and understands all too well that all decisions are, at bottom, political. This is a pathology in which the members and the professionals of the Secretariat join equally and that undermines the organization's good efforts. Whether and to what extent it is curable is an open, and very important, question.

SANCTIONS ARE A popular tool of multilateral statecraft, but not because they work. They tend to be used, as Simon Chesterman, a professor of international law at New York University, says, "where there's enough political will to do more than denounce the situation, but not enough to actually do something about the situation." The Iraqi sanctions were the biggest, the most complex, and the longest-lasting ever implemented by the United Nations. The fact that they turned out to be porous and manipulable is thus much less surprising than the fact that they worked at all.

Iraq was placed under what are known as "comprehensive" sanctions—a total embargo on trade that aims, in effect, to starve an adversary into submission. The Oil-for-Food Programme was designed to cure, or at least mitigate, the inevitable consequences of such a drastic sanctions regime. In the Kurdish areas, where the United Nations controlled the flow of goods made possible by the program, health and nutrition returned largely to prewar levels. The effect was less ameliorative elsewhere in Iraq, because Saddam used his control over distribution to siphon off the supplies and thus preserve the propaganda weapon of mass suffering. Nevertheless, the threat of starvation and epi-

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demic receded—as did the threat to the sanctions themselves, which had been sustained by a genuine global consensus on the dangers posed by Saddam's regime. The sanctions not only kept the inspectors rooting out Saddam's WMD programs—at least through 1998, when Saddam kicked them out of the country—but also deprived him of the revenue he needed to rebuild his war machine and threaten his neighbors. Kenneth Pollack, the former Clinton administration official who helped convince many wavering Democrats to support the war by arguing that sanctions had given Iraq cover to reconstitute its WMD programs, now concedes that "the combination of inspections backed by powerful sanctions worked in disarming Iraq."

Among the unintended victims of the sanctions blunderbuss were Iraq's neighbors, several of whom were important U.S. allies. Iraq served as an indispensable source of cheap oil for Jordan, Turkey, and Syria. Throughout the '90s, starting well before the Oil-for-Food Programme was established, a continuous caravan of tankers illegally carried Iraqi oil across the country's borders. The United Nations could do nothing about this, and the United States made no attempt to stop the trade. "We were not going to address the Jordanian smuggling," says Pollack, who oversaw the Oil-for-Food Programme for the White House from 1999 to 2001. "In the case of Turkey, we tried a couple of times, but the Turks made a horrific stink. We weren't going to keep fighting, because we felt we had bigger fish to fry"—maintaining the inspections, the no-fly zones over northern and southern Iraq, and the sanctions themselves.

It is this illicit trade in oil, accepted and even protected by three successive U.S. administrations, that accounts for the enormous numbers associated with the Oil-for-Food "theft." This past November, Senator Norm Coleman, the Minnesota Republican who chairs the Senate subcommittee investigating the program, issued a set of calculations purporting to show that Saddam had stolen a stupefying $21.3 billion under the cover of the U.N. program. This was transparently disingenuous, since two-thirds of the total consisted of oil-smuggling over which, as Coleman must have known, the United Nations had no jurisdiction. Volcker's report is conclusive on this score: "[T]he major source of external financial resources to the Iraqi Regime resulted from sanctions violations outside the Programme's framework."

Nevertheless, even subtracting these very large sums, billions of dollars were stolen from the program, principally in the form of kickbacks on the goods Iraq purchased with its oil revenue. (The Volcker panel estimates this figure at $1.7 to $2.5 billion; the Coleman committee suggests a much splashier $7.5 billion.) The scam was perfectly straightforward: Iraqi officials instructed contractors delivering food, medicine, trucks, water-purification plants, and the like to add 10 percent to the actual price, and then to wire a payment equal to the extra sum to an account controlled by Iraq. How did the United Nations manage to miss this systematic cheating? The principal allegations have been that either U.N. officials, above all Benon Sevan (who ran the Office of the Iraq Programme), or Cotecna (the firm that was hired in late 1998 to inspect goods as they crossed the border) turned a blind eye, presumably in exchange for bribes. The Volcker panel will deal with these issues in a later report.

The Oil-for-Food Programme, which, over the years of its existence, monitored the sale of $64 billion in oil and the purchase of a corresponding amount of goods, was an enormous technical and financial exercise that, on the evidence of the Volcker report, occasionally overwhelmed the U.N.'s modest managerial capacity. Yet responsibility for the program lay not with Kofi Annan and his aides, but with the Security Council. The Council administers sanctions programs: Whenever it votes to impose such a punishment, it establishes a committee, consisting of representatives of the members, to administer the sanctions and then draws on the Secretariat for staff. Sevan periodically briefed Deputy Secretary-General Louise Frechette on Oil-for-Food, but he reported to the Council.

The Security Council members, who received the contracts from Sevan's office for approval, were well aware of Saddam's schemes, if not of their systematic nature. One ambassador of a current Council member-state says that "the committee was aware of the risk of abuse" and understood that many contracts contained "not just inappropriate stuff, but stuff which was incorrectly invoiced"—though he added that many of the contracts were so mind-numbingly long and detailed that it was often almost impossible to unravel the secret thread. Pollack says, "We did not know the number, and we could not be certain that this was going on. But everyone knew in his bones that this was the case; we had enough anecdotal reports about companies striking deals with the Iraqis."

Both Pollack and a British official say that they tried to block some particularly egregious examples of fraud. But the fact remains that neither the United States nor the United Kingdom ever officially vetoed a contract over concerns about fraudulent pricing. In fact, the U.N. Office of the Iraq Programme brought instances of suspicious pricing to the attention of the sanctions committee on 70 or so occasions; none of those contracts, however, were ultimately blocked. The U.N. professionals, in other words, were focusing on the merits, while the five permanent members of the Security Council were making political decisions according to their own priorities. A team of analysts at the State Department pored over every contract for signs of "dual-use" items that might have a hidden military purpose, often placing contracts on hold for months. The French, the Russians, and the Chinese, whether out of humanitarian or commercial or merely anti-American calculations, did everything to keep the pipeline full.

Officials from the major countries understood the game in all its complexity and cynicism. It was ugly, but it worked. And then, in retrospect, the whole contraption was reduced to ... Kofigate. Many diplomats were revolted by the brutal attack conservatives launched against the United Nations—though not, of course, revolted enough to say so in

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public. In early December 2004, at the monthly lunch Annan holds with the Security Council, Emyr Jones Parry, the British ambassador, shattered the ritual pieties by saying, "It is an abomination to blame the secretary-general and the Secretariat for something supposedly on the order of $20 billion when the sanctions committee was fully aware of what was happening, and the committee as a whole was unwilling to do anything about it." Jones Parry pointed out that, in 2001, when the British sponsored a resolution to put a stop to oil-smuggling, the Bush administration was quite content to let it die.

How did Oil-for-Food swell from a kind of sanctions prosthesis to a scandal of world-historical proportions? The steady drip of ugly revelations—Saddam's personally approved list of recipients of Iraqi oil vouchers, the kickback scheme, and, of course, the unspooling and deliciously circumstantial narrative of Kojo Annan—would certainly have gotten the United Nations in hot water. But the scandal was also a heaven-sent gift for conservatives. The unilateralist wing of the Republican Party has long fumed at the idea that the United States must seek "legitimacy" for its actions from the U.N. Security Council. For many of them, the U.N.'s failure to offer that precious good in the case of the war against Iraq constituted an irreparable breach, compounded when Kofi Annan declared the war "illegal" and then criticized the planned assault on Falluja two days before the U.S. presidential election. For conservatives, Oil-for-Food was the rope with which the United Nations was to hang itself.

It was this wish to marginalize the United Nations, or at least to reap the political benefit of U.N.-bashing, that explains the wild hyperbole over the numbers, the refusal to distinguish between the United Nations and its members, and, finally, the demands for Annan's head. The Kofi-must-go movement peaked in early December, when Coleman wrote an op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal* calling on Annan to resign. Coleman insisted that Annan was stonewalling the investigations, though he furnished no evidence that this was so. Senator Carl Levin, the committee's ranking Democrat, was so incensed that he appeared on CNN the following day to praise Annan's cooperation and to say that the subcommittee had received no evidence of impropriety on Annan's part.

Annan was especially vulnerable because of his feckless son. Much about the Kojo story does, in fact, invite suspicion: He worked as a consultant for Cotecna; his contract was first said to have ended in December 1998, the month Cotecna won the goods-inspection contract, and then turned out to have lasted another year; still later it was revealed that Kojo had been paid $2,500 a month for four more years as part of a "non-compete agreement"; and, finally, he billed Cotecna for $54,700 in expenses in 1998, many of them run up at U.N. events. All this could mean . . . what? "Did Kojo inform Sevan about the fees," William Safire wondered in November, "or know about any lucrative oil vouchers given by Saddam to Sevan?" Need we even ask? As Fox News commentator John Gibson blithely affirmed, "Annan's son was in on the scam."

And yet, in the avalanche of documents being leaked to the press, and in the whole corpus of information available to investigators, nothing has yet appeared to corroborate these speculations. Until recently, investigators for the Volcker panel believed that the Kojo story was all smoke and no fire. Now they appear to have found some evidence connecting Kojo to the Oil-for-Food Programme, as well as evidence casting doubt on Kofi Annan's claims that he knew next to nothing of his son's activities. It's not clear how serious any of this material will prove to be. The panel will produce a report on Kojo's activities several weeks from now.

The most fascinating—and, for the United Nations, perhaps the most discomfiting—passage in the Volcker report is its discussion of the selection in 1996 of a bank to hold Iraq's oil revenue in escrow and of firms to inspect the movement of oil and of goods. These were decisions made by the Secretariat, not by the Security Council, but the report's narrative shines a floodlight on the perverse relation between the two. The United Nations had a minutely detailed procurement policy designed to ensure a meritocratic choice of contractor. Accordingly, responsible officials solicited bids and drew up lists of the banks and inspection firms with the most experience, the best record, and the lowest cost. And, in each case, officials higher up the chain chose a less qualified firm. Why? In minutes of a meeting of the Iraq Steering Group from August 13, 1996, Chinmaya Gharekhan, one of then–Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's closest advisers, said, "Everything about implementation of 986 [the Oil-for-Food resolution] was 'political,' and no aspect could be assessed purely on its merits. The Secretariat had come under terrible pressure from member-states; the selection of [oil] overseers, the bank, and the firm to supply oil inspection agents had all been political."

Reading these narratives, it is not always clear whether the Secretariat is reacting to pressure from members or has so thoroughly internalized this political dynamic that the pressure is superfluous. Boutros-Ghali appears to decide in advance that the escrow bank should be French—perhaps because the Iraqis won't accept an American or British one, nor the Americans a Swiss one—and instructs the French ambassador to draw up a list of interested French banks. Once Banque Nationale de Paris wins the contract, despite numerous demerits, members of the Steering Committee, which includes many of Boutros-Ghali's chief aides, conclude that it would be "unacceptable" to award the contract for goods inspection to a French firm as well, even though a French firm is the lowest bidder. Instead, they invoke a clause allowing merit considerations to be overruled by the "interests of the Organization," which they understand to mean keeping important members happy. They decide to award the contract to Lloyd's of London.

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It is instructive to compare the behavior of Boutros-Ghali's top aides to that of Sevan. According to the Volcker report, Sevan repeatedly solicited Iraqi officials for allocations of oil on behalf of an Egyptian trader; in one case, the Iraqis granted the requests immediately after Sevan talked to them about his hopes to expand access to spare parts for their oil industry. This behavior is so shocking that many U.N. officials I know simply refused to believe it until the Volcker report appeared—a reaction that suggests that it is, in fact, aberrational. The deference to members and their political calculations, on the other hand, is an institutional reflex, not only in procurement matters but in personnel decisions and, ultimately, in the most fundamental matters.

At a press briefing after the Volcker panel released the interim report, Mark Malloch Brown, Annan's new chief of staff, was asked if the report should be read as "an indictment of United Nations culture." Malloch Brown was candid enough to concede that "the culture of political complicity" was a serious problem. Members, he said, should "back off and allow us to manage this organization." But will they back off? Can they? The United Nations is an instrument to be used by its members; it matters insofar as states are willing and able to use it to express their common will, which is to say, their political objectives. The Iraq sanctions committee was a perfect example of the organization's possibilities and its limitations: There was just barely enough common ground for the United States and the United Kingdom on the one hand, and France, Russia, and China on the other, to satisfy their conflicting political objectives without the process breaking down altogether. U.N. officials could do little more than watch and deal with the consequences.

Powerlessness breeds passivity; U.N. officials rail against their dependent status while at the same time taking refuge in it. If a peacekeeping operation goes wrong, for example, it's because the Security Council refused to give the troops a robust mandate. The members micromanage the budget, protect useless fiefdoms, and demand even low-level jobs for their citizens. It's all true, but it fosters a culture in which no one feels personally accountable.

Is it possible to foster a culture of accountability and professionalism in an organization that must be so acutely responsive to the wishes of its masters? Is it possible, for example, to fill jobs with the best candidates so long as the principle of "equitable national distribution" must be honored? If the answer is no, then we need to envision other kinds of organization. People who care about the United Nations will have to demand a change in culture, but also permit a change in culture. The members will, in fact, have to back off on managerial issues. The United States will have to stop trying to starve and intimidate the United Nations into submission. And the organization's managers will have to behave as if they had the kind of autonomy and authority they seek. If the Oil-for-Food scandal ultimately provokes these changes, the United Nations should be grateful for its enemies. ■

Kofi Annan's silence.

Blame Game

BY CLAUDIA ROSETT

ON FEBRUARY 3, the United Nations–authorized inquiry into the Oil-for-Food scandal, led by former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker, issued its first interim report. Volcker's most lurid finding so far is that Saddam Hussein, at the behest of Oil-for-Food Programme Executive Director Benon Sevan, allocated lucrative oil sales to a Panama-based company. This, concluded Volcker, constituted "a grave and continuing conflict of interest" on Sevan's part and a violation of the U.N. charter. Investigators are now pondering Volcker's disclosure that Sevan's aunt, while living on a government pension in Cyprus, sent Sevan a series of payments from 1999 through 2003 totaling $160,000. The aunt then died in 2004 after falling down an elevator shaft, right around the time the United Nations, after much stonewalling by U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and assorted protests of innocence from Sevan, agreed to launch an official probe into Oil-for-Food.

But Volcker's recent interim report—there is another interim one expected soon and a final report due out this summer—does not even begin to address the true dimensions of Oil-for-Food, in which the United Nations oversaw more than $110 billion of Saddam's business transactions while Saddam racked up sanctions-busting illicit income estimated at anywhere from $9 to $17 billion. The emerging picture is that Oil-for-Food was the largest scam in the history of humanitarian relief. And the big questions are: Who at the United Nations might be to blame? And what needs fixing?

At the United Nations, public accountability can ricochet forever between the Secretariat, which functions as its executive branch, and the Security Council. But, in this case, ultimate responsibility must rest with Annan. Although the Security Council created and oversaw the Oil-for-Food Programme, staff from Annan's Secretariat helped design and run the program, and the Secretariat benefited financially from its existence and pushed for its expansion. Annan knew the program was corrupt. In choosing to remain silent about its abuses, he failed to uphold the integrity of his office and of the United Nations as a whole.

AUTHORIZED BY THE United Nations in 1995 to relieve the suffering of Iraq's people while keeping Saddam under U.N. sanctions, Oil-for-Food was originally advertised as a way to let Saddam sell oil abroad to buy food and medicine for Iraq's citizens.

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To cover its costs for overseeing the program, the Secretariat collected 2.2 percent of the revenue on every barrel of oil sold, amounting to $1.4 billion over the life of the program (plus another 0.8 percent, or $500 million, to pay for weapons inspections that ceased in late 1998, when Saddam stopped cooperating with them). This meant that Annan—who was secretary-general for all but the first month of the program—did not have to petition member-states for donations to run Oil-for-Food. Instead, the program was self-perpetuating. Both the relief funds and the U.N. overhead flowed from Iraq's oil wells. The program ran from December 1996 to November 2003, with the United Nations monitoring oil sales totaling $64 billion and relief contracts totaling $46 billion, of which some $39 billion had been delivered by the time the United Nations ended its role, seven months after Saddam's fall. The program racked up a few billion more in interest income and foreign exchange earnings, and it paid out $18 billion to a U.N. commission set up to compensate victims of Saddam's 1990 invasion of Kuwait. The United Nations turned the remaining relief contracts over to the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad.

As the United Nations designed, expanded, and embellished the program, Saddam was increasingly treated as an esteemed businessman rather than as a tyrant needing close supervision. The United Nations from the start let Saddam choose to whom he would sell oil and decide what goods Iraqis needed, subject to U.N. approval. The Secretariat, which retained records of Saddam's transactions, kept critical details of the deals secret, including the names of his business partners and the prices paid for relief supplies. When it became apparent that Saddam, under cover of this confidentiality, was using graft to siphon money from the deals for his own uses, Annan failed to sound a public alarm—even though he did so on other Oil-for-Food-related matters. When the United States and the United Kingdom slowed down the processing of contracts in order to scrutinize them more closely for weapons matériel, for example, Annan repeatedly criticized them in public, voicing his "serious concern." By contrast, when the Security Council's Sanctions Committee approved a series of contracts that the U.N.'s own staff had flagged as suspicious, Annan said nothing publicly.

Today, many details of these Oil-for-Food deals have come to light. To pore over them is to glimpse a vast tracery of secret bank accounts, bribes, kickbacks, front companies, and bizarre predilections by Saddam for stuff like milk sold by Russian oil companies and soap from Sudan. All the signs are that Saddam's regime worked every possible angle to its own advantage at the expense of Iraq's people—underpricing oil, overpaying for many relief supplies by 10 percent or more, demanding kickbacks, and then either splitting the skimmed-off take with business partners or offering fat profits to some of them in hopes of buying political influence aimed at lifting the sanctions.

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OVER THE PAST year, as each fresh Oil-for-Food revelation has hit the headlines, Annan has professed himself "surprised," "disappointed," and, most recently, "shocked." Along the way, his Secretariat has sent out hush letters to contractors, such as the inspectors hired by the Secretariat to monitor aspects of Oil-for-Food. Meanwhile, his senior p.r. staffers have produced a barrage of statements, articles, and letters to the editor explaining that the prime culprit was Saddam Hussein (fair enough, except the point was for the United Nations to oversee him); arguing that, within the U.N. sphere, the Security Council, not the Secretariat, was mainly to blame (but it was Annan whose Secretariat hired the inspectors and had the big budget to keep tabs); and that the Secretariat just followed orders and had no real say in the program (but Annan actively pushed to expand it, handpicked the now-disgraced Sevan to run it, and signed off personally on every six-month phase of the program, recommending to the Security Council that it be continued).

Another common argument is that, in an institution as large and complex as the United Nations, when administering a program as huge and troublesome as Oil-for-Food, there is bound to be some corruption. This is the real world; live with it. Oil-for-Food worked. Sanctions kept Saddam from rearming. The Iraqi people got fed. In a statement last week to the U.N. staff, Annan said that, despite having "to work with a corrupt and despotic Iraqi regime under almost impossible conditions," Oil-for-Food achieved successes he hoped would not be forgotten, delivering rations to 27 million Iraqis.

But this argument misses the fact that U.N. sanctions, meant to be reinforced by weapons inspections while undermining or even toppling Saddam, were greatly weakened by Oil-for-Food. The result was to strengthen Saddam, who was the cause of the Iraqi people's suffering in the first place. In the report of the U.S. Iraq Survey Group, issued last fall, the CIA's chief weapons inspector, Charles Duelfer—who did not find WMD but did take a good look at Saddam's graft—concluded, "The introduction of the Oil-for-Food program (OFF) in late 1996 was a key turning point for the Regime. OFF rescued Baghdad's economy from a terminal decline created by sanctions."

Investigators for Senator Norm Coleman's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations found roughly the same inflection point when they looked at the oil-smuggling that became an especially large source of illicit sustenance for Saddam—helping him pay not only for palaces but also, as Duelfer documents, the import of clandestine arms. Under U.N. sanctions from 1991 to 1996, prior to Oil-for-Food, Saddam's estimated smuggling totaled $3.9 billion. Once Oil-for-Food kicked in, from 1996 to 2003, Saddam's smuggling volumes more than doubled to an estimated $9.7 billion.

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The Secretariat has claimed that this smuggling fell outside the purview of Oil-for-Food. But it was Oil-for-Food that helped Saddam revamp the oil infrastructure whence the smuggled oil came. In the Volcker interim report, one of the mentions made about suspicious behavior on the part of Sevan is that he "supported proposals to create an 'oil spare parts' program: to grant Iraq's long-standing request to use funds from the humanitarian escrow account for the import of parts and equipment to repair and maintain Iraq's oil production and infrastructure."

What Volcker did not mention is that the proposals to revive Saddam's oil industry, supported by Sevan, were made to the Security Council by Kofi Annan. Oil parts were not included in the original program. In February 1998, in the midst of a showdown over Saddam's initial attempt to block the U.N. weapons inspectors from several sites, it was Annan, not Sevan, who went to the Security Council and urged that the ceiling on Saddam's oil exports be raised. Annan then flew to Iraq, met with Saddam, and announced, "I think I can do business with him." Briefly, Saddam agreed to cooperate with the inspectors. On April 15, in a letter to the Security Council, Annan urged that oil parts be brought into the program "to enable Iraq to increase most urgently the export of petroleum." The Security Council agreed. Later that year, Saddam again blocked the inspectors, this time altogether, after which they left the country. On December 29, Annan again urged the Security Council to let Saddam import more oil equipment: "Otherwise it may be difficult to sustain even the current level of production and export of oil." Annan included no warning that Saddam was already producing enough oil to be smuggling billions—though it was the Secretariat to which the oil inspectors and experts reported.

All this was good business not only for Saddam, but for the U.N. Secretariat, which to this day has shrugged off the effects on its own behavior of huge financial incentives essentially supplied by Saddam. So, unfortunately, has the Volcker committee, which commented in its recent report that the Secretariat, in collecting 2.2 percent of Saddam's official oil sales, was not receiving a "commission." No one has alleged that the 2.2 percent was collected as a form of profit for the U.N. Secretariat to spend any way it chose. But that money did constitute a big chunk of change for things that, in U.N. realms, are also a form of coin, generating hundreds of millions of dollars for jobs portioned out by the Secretariat. As long as the United Nations approved Saddam's selling of oil abroad, 2.2 percent of the revenue rolled automatically into the Secretariat's coffers—flooding the same account into which Annan dipped last year to fish out $30 million from the residual funds to pay for the Volcker inquiry. That money by rights belongs to the people of Iraq. But Annan, rather than go through the rigors of raising the funds elsewhere to pay for Volcker's inquiry, went right back last October to the old Saddam honey jar. Had Annan from the start been required to fund the administration of Oil-for-Food by soliciting donations from member-states—instead of collecting a percentage from the same sales he was supposed to be monitoring—would he still have pushed to expand the program until it entailed more than $1 billion merely in U.N. overhead?

In the run-up to Volcker's interim report, and in the debate now following, much discussion of Oil-for-Food has focused on procedure. Not yet addressed is that, in a system as secretive and creaking as the U.N.'s, the only true safeguard is the character of the boss. And, if anyone is boss at the United Nations, it is the secretary-general, who enjoys the prerogative to speak above the cacophony of the member-states. Nor is Annan shy about doing so. Last fall, during the U.S. presidential campaign, he was willing to pronounce his view that the United States overthrow of Saddam was "illegal." Since the Oil-for-Food scandal broke in early 2004, Annan's spokesmen—presumably with his approval—have repeatedly, and publicly, blamed the Security Council. That Annan would in effect point a finger at the Security Council in order to defend himself—but decline to speak up during Oil-for-Food on behalf of the defrauded people of Iraq, the betrayed trust of the world public, or the integrity of the United Nations itself (as opposed to its image)—should be troubling.

Plus, it seems Annan himself had a family tie to Oil-for-Food. Documents obtained by investigators outside the U.N. inquiry show that Annan's son, Kojo Annan, served as a consultant to a Swiss-based company, Cotecna Inspection, while Cotecna was bidding on a lucrative U.N. Oil-for-Food contract to monitor relief goods arriving in Iraq. Both Kojo Annan's lawyers and Cotecna have denied any wrongdoing, saying that Kojo Annan worked in West Africa, not on Iraq, and that he quit his consultancy in 1998 (on the same day the company won the U.N. contract). But, as discovered last year by the press, for the duration of its Oil-for-Food work—1999 to 2003—Cotecna sent Kojo Annan a series of monthly "non-compete" payments, which, together with assorted perks, totaled well over $100,000. Volcker has said he will cover these matters in a second interim report before issuing his final word this summer.

There is one sense in which Oil-for-Food did accomplish something good. In swelling and rotting to a degree that in the end the world could not ignore, Oil-for-Food, in the postmortem, offers an unprecedented view into the inner workings of the United Nations. For anyone who believes there is value to the peace and prosperity–promoting institution the United Nations was meant to be, the work ahead should be not to preserve a Potemkin image of integrity but to take a long, hard look at what's wrong with the foundations and to rebuild the place from the ground up. Far greater transparency would be an immense help in keeping the place honest. But reform has to start with the Secretariat and proceed along lines that will produce secretaries-general willing to work vigorously not to save themselves, or please their pals, but to protect the integrity of the institution. ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Last Acts

A MERE TEN YEARS AFTER Adolf Hitler's death, the illustrious Austrian director G. W. Pabst made *The Last Ten Days,* a fictional re-creation of the finale in Hitler's bunker under the chancellery in Berlin. As I recall Pabst's film, it portrayed Hitler as a maniac—only a decade after he had been treated as a divinity. Pabst, who had been elsewhere before World War II, was trapped in Germany just before the war, he said, by a traveling accident. He made three films under the Nazis, and after the war, as if in expiation, he made this exposé of Hitlerian madness.

DOWNFALL
(Newmarket)

Through the years other kinds of Hitler films followed in other countries. Two that also concentrated on the finale were *Hitler: The Last Ten Days* (1973), made in Italy with Alec Guinness as Hitler, and *The Empty Mirror* (1996), British, with Norman Rodway in the role. Documentaries of course abounded, one of the best being *Blind Spot* (2002), the reminiscences of Traudl Junge, who had been Hitler's personal secretary, had gone through the finale in the bunker, and managed to survive. The Junge film and the book from which it derived are two of the three sources—the other being a book by Joachim Fest—on which Bernd Eichinger based his screenplay of **DOWNFALL.** In fact, the film begins with a bit of Junge's commentary, and it closes with a clip from her film in which she tells us that at the time she knew nothing of the Nazi horrors.

Downfall was directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel, who has been active in German television and has done two previous features (unseen by me). In every aspect, his film is superbly made. Almost all of it takes place in the bunker, which was extensive, and Hirschbiegel transforms the concrete walls and the underground light into a leitmotif of his picture. People move through the corridors attending to this or that, but it all seems a subterranean charade about what was once an immense empire. Rainer Klausmann's camera makes the artificial light *seem* artificial, to emphasize the frantic puppetry of those closing days.

The cast is—the only word—perfect. Hitler is Bruno Ganz, the Swiss actor whose forty-year stage and film career has been exemplary. In the theater he was prominent in one of the outstanding European companies of the period, Peter Stein's Berliner Schaubühne, where he appeared in works by, among many others, Goethe and Ibsen and Brecht. Of his many films I mention only the exquisite *Marquise of O*, in which he was the Russian officer.

In *Downfall,* Hitler is first seen in November 1942, an amiable, somewhat bowed man, as he engages Traudl Junge (demurely played by Alexandra Maria Lara). Then we elide two and a half years. In 1945—April 20, Hitler's birthday—we are in the bunker while the Soviet armies above are closing in on the city. Hitler now is ridden with the fury of the frustrated, issuing large and quite impossible military orders, yet still with gentle touches for the favored few: Junge, Eva Braun, Joseph Goebbels and his wife, and his dog Blondi. Ganz portrays this Hitler with a body that seems shrunken without actually shrinking, the left hand behind his back trembling constantly, a result of the July 20, 1944 assassination attempt. (Pabst, by the way, had also made a film about July 20.)

Ganz brings off an extraordinary technical achievement. Very early in the bunker he bursts into rage about something and rants at the top of his voice. Immediately we think of the actor's problem: his performance has peaked too early. But these outbursts recur and recur, and Ganz not only masters them technically, he conveys that these are not high moments in the usual theater sense, monitored for dramatic effect—they are integers of the man's character, as much a part of him as his arms and legs.

All the other actors are authentic, creating men and women, not dummy historical figures. Three must be cited. Juliane Köhler makes Eva Braun devoted, ready for whatever must happen, yet breezy and light. Ulrich Mattes plays Joseph Goebbels as a thoughtful, loyal, grave man. Corinna Harfouch, who is beautiful, plays his wife like a protagonist in Greek tragedy, poised, clear-eyed, perceiving calmly what fate has ordained. The scene in which she poisons her six sleeping children is done with a measure that gives it a classic air.

That scene is a key moment in the atmosphere of *Downfall*, exemplifying the film's problem. Ever since World War II, it has been clear that a fiction film could deal with the finish of Hitler and his group in one of two ways: either as ravening beasts finally getting the fate they deserved or as consecrated idealists who believed in what they had done and were willing to pay with their lives for their actions. The historical evidence of the behavior in the bunker supports the latter view. I can't remember clearly the tenor of the bunker films that I have seen, but *Downfall*, apparently faithful to the facts, evokes—torments us with—a discomfiting species of sympathy or admiration.

We do not see here the Goebbels who spat venomously at civilization, nor does this noble husband and father resemble the wild philanderer he had been. Hitler, courageous, filled with mad heroism, is not the degenerate who (as a closing title reminds us) started a war that took fifty million lives. He does say, as he becomes convinced of his defeat, that at least he rid Europe of the Jews, and he adds later, "Compassion is the primal sin." But, in the large, this is a staunch figure, refusing for a time to accept the iron facts and at last choosing, with his newly married wife, death rather than humiliation.

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Thus the very virtues of the film leave us disturbed and puzzled. Why was *Downfall* made? Was it an attempt to balance the world's black view of Hitler, to show that at least he was sincere and brave? It would have been stupid to alter the account, to film a comic-book cartoon of those last days with all the Nazi bigwigs as craven weaklings. But, since the film had to be made this way if at all, why was it made? What was the purpose in the minds of Eichinger and Hirschbiegel?

Many, I hope, remember *Hitler, A Film From Germany* (1977) by Hans-Jürgen Syberberg. It is not strictly a film about Hitler: rather, it is a visionary, philosophical fantasia about a felt need in Germany for Hitler, and about his creation. (In one scene the dead Hitler, clad in a toga, speaks to Germany from the grave of Wagner: "I was and am the end of your most secret wishes, the legend and reality of your dreams....")

Syberberg called Hitler "the greatest film-maker of all time," asserting that Hitler created World War II for the same reason he commissioned Leni Riefenstahl to film the Nuremberg Party Congress, "in order to view the rushes privately every evening.... It is very interesting that the only objects to remain of the Third Reich are fragments of celluloid: nothing else exists—not the architecture of Albert Speer, nor the borders of the big German Reich of which Hitler dreamed—only the celluloid record of his existence, of the war." To that celluloid record, *Downfall* is a well-wrought, troubling postscript. ■

JENNIFER HOMANS ON DANCE

Swan Lake and Stalin

Art in the aftermath of tyranny.

I.

THE KIROV BALLET OWES ITS name to Joseph Stalin. In 1934, Stalin contrived the murder of Sergei Kirov, first secretary of the Communist Party in Leningrad, and then used his death to justify launching the Great Terror. Leningrad, the country's cultural capital and Kirov's personal fief, was crippled, and power was thereafter concentrated in Moscow. In a symbolic coup de grâce, the city's State Academic Theater for Opera and Ballet (formerly known as the Maryinsky), a bastion of classical ballet and opera in Russia since the nineteenth century, was given the dubious honor of memorializing Kirov's name.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 and Leningrad became once again St. Petersburg, the Kirov followed suit and reverted to its own former imperial title. In the West, this posed a problem. The Kirov was famous—it had given the world Nureyev and Baryshnikov—but few knew of the Maryinsky. As a result, the company is now the Kirov in New York, London, and Paris, and the Maryinsky at home in St. Petersburg. This problem of nomenclature points to a vexing post-Soviet dilemma facing Russian ballet today. The Kirov was, after all, an arm of the now-discredited party-state. Should the company close the door on its Soviet past, re-open Peter the Great's "window on the West," and rush to "catch up" with Europe and America? Or is there something of value worth preserving from the ballet of Soviet times?

If the West figures prominently in such questions, there is good historical reason. Many of Russia's finest dancers and choreographers either came from the West or else left Russia to make their careers there. Indeed, the origins of the Maryinsky/Kirov lie in the early eighteenth century, when Peter the Great brought dances from France as part of his ambition to make his city the envy of Europe, and the Empress Anna recruited French and Italian ballet masters to guild her court. Moscow also imported ballet, but in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries its Bolshoi Ballet would develop a bolder, brasher, and more flamboyant style of dance. The court at St. Petersburg, by contrast, favored Parisian taste and refinement, and a steady stream of European talent fed its nascent classical tradition.

The decisive moment came in 1847, when the French dancer Marius Petipa arrived in St. Petersburg. Petipa spent the next fifty-six years at the Imperial Theaters, working with Italian, Scandinavian, Russian, and French artists employed by the court. With them, he fused the various European schools of dance into a distinctive Russian style, and his works, such as *La Bayadère* (first staged in 1877), *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890), and (with Ivanov) *Swan Lake* (1895), continue to define Russian ballet today.

Petipa's ballets were lavish, full-length spectacles, which told stories through alternating sequences of dance and mime. The stage was filled with live horses, stuffed elephants, fountains spraying colored water, trapdoors, and dozens of dancers in ornate costumes. Above all, Petipa's ballets displayed courtly manners and noble behavior, often tinged with exotic or vaguely Christian imagery. The ballerina reigned, and was courted and supported (literally) by her prince or suitor. Then came the soloist dancers followed by a corps de ballet, who often danced in strict unison, forming straight lines, symmetrical patterns, and graceful but militarily precise maneuvers. One of the czar's aides confided to Maurice Paléologue, the French ambassador to Russia, in 1916 that for many Russians Petipa's work offered "a very close picture of what Russian society was, and ought to be. Order, punctiliousness, symmetry, work well done *everywhere*."

IN RESPONSE TO THE UPHEAVALS OF 1905, World War I, and the Russian Revolution, many of the dancers and choreographers trained under Petipa and his successors fled the country, taking their skills and knowledge to Europe and America. (They included Fokine, Nijinsky and his sister Bronislava, the impresario Diaghilev, and perhaps most importantly, Georgi Balanchivadze, or George Balanchine.) Those who remained in Russia were swept into heated debates about what constituted "socialist" forms of dance. Classical ballet was a natural target: at first Lenin saw it as a corrupt "landowners" art, but finally he conceded that it was the rightful heritage of the proletariat, and the

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former Maryinsky Theater became the self-appointed guardian of Petipa's legacy. Indeed, the company has often been seen as a haven that protected imperial classicism from the artistic degradations of Bolshevism. Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet, by contrast, became known as the official showcase of Soviet ballet, and it often colored (many say corrupted) Petipa's style with its ever brasher, more athletic, and bravura dancing.

In reality, things were not quite so simple. Fedor Lopukhov, who directed the ballet at the former Maryinsky from 1922 to 1930, restored several Petipa classics that had fallen into disrepair. To judge from Lopukhov's own account, however, he also wanted to "correct" what he took to be Petipa's musical "errors," and to bring dance and music into tighter synchrony. He was suspicious of mime, which he disparagingly referred to as "circus fantasia." By reducing Petipa's classicism to abstract form, he hoped to reveal the true nature of ballet as "an international and classless art."

In the interests of this goal, Lopukhov did not hesitate to modify Petipa's ballets as he saw fit, even inserting music that Petipa himself had cut. For Lopukhov, this "corrected" art was a more real, more evolved Petipa. In 1929, he went even further and created entirely new choreography for Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker*, which included cartwheels and chorus girls. The ballet's acrobatics caused such an uproar that Lopukhov was obliged to issue a formal "self-criticism." The following year, he lost his job.

COURTESY LENINGRAD THEATER MUSEUM

FEDOR LOPUKHOV, *The Ice Maiden*, 1927

HE WAS REPLACED BY Agrippina Vaganova. Vaganova is a legendary figure in classical ballet, and her name is now practically synonymous with the Russian style. Born in 1879, she danced under Petipa, directed the ballet at the former Maryinsky from 1931 to 1937, and taught at its celebrated school until her death in 1951. But Vaganova was not just a Petipa conservator; she played a major part in bringing the imperial legacy into the Soviet era. "Give us a Soviet theme," she said in 1929, "and then we shall succeed in producing a high artistic Soviet production even with the idiom of old classical ballet." And so her version of *Swan Lake* in 1933 retained many of the Petipa/Ivanov steps, but made the story more "realistic": blood was spattered on the white swan's wings, and the entire ballet was set as a decadent dream unfolding in the mind of a rich and corrupt count.

Vaganova was not working in isolation. From 1931 to 1934, Sergei Radlov directed the former Maryinsky Theater. Radlov was a theater director interested in applying Stanislavsky's psychological methods of acting to ballet. Working with choreographers, designers, and musicians, he and Vaganova were instrumental in developing *drambalet*, an emerging narrative form that prized acting over pure dance and sought to portray "real" socialist characters, whose inner heroism would express the ideals of communism. "At one time," Leonid Lavrovsky, a prominent choreographer of *drambalet*, once explained, "we used to depict princes and princesses, butterflies and elves ... but Man as such was never shown in ballet."

Vaganova also rationalized, codified, and institutionalized imperial technique and style. Her "method," a rigorous training course that still forms the basis of Kirov training today, eschewed aristocratic gesture and emphasized instead the formal logic of Petipa's classicism. Ballerinas trained in the imperial era speak of the elegant restraint and aristocratic manners of ballet; those trained by Vaganova, by contrast, analyze the mechanics of a step in order to achieve the smoothest, most harmonious physical coordination.

This emphasis on ballet as a rational system of movement did not preclude "soulful" dancing. Indeed, Vaganova insisted that dancers suffuse every movement with human feeling. This was different from the formal manners and the noble passions that had animated Petipa's dances. In Vaganova's teaching, the emotional content of ballet was more psychological and anatomical, a way of infusing the body with feeling. Vaganova's ideas dovetailed neatly with those of socialist realism, and for several decades ballet at the Kirov would be dominated by *drambalet*. Indeed, over time even imperial classics such as *Swan Lake*, *Raymonda*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, and *La Bayadère* were revised in the image of *drambalet*, mostly at the hand of Konstantin Sergeyev.

For some, Sergeyev is a hated figure who brutally repressed young talent in the interests of maintaining his own power and promoting his wife, the ballerina Natalia Dudinskaya. But he was also a fine classical dancer who first made his name dancing with Galina Ulanova in the *drambalets* of the 1930s. Later, he worked on Petipa's classics, cutting mime, adding dances, beefing up male roles, revising plots. In his 1950 version of *Swan Lake*, which the company still performs exquisitely today, the traditional story of lovers sent to a tragic death by an evil sorcerer but united in the afterlife was turned on its head. Under pressure from the censors, Sergeyev made the sorcerer die an agonizing death so that the lovers could be blissfully joined on earth, not in heaven.

More radical choreographic experiments were cut off. Lopukhov's *Bright Stream*, to music by Shostakovich (first

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performed at Leningrad's Maly Opera Theater in 1935), was attacked in *Pravda* in 1936 for failing accurately to portray the "life of the people." Anything the party construed to be "formalist" or otherwise ideologically deviant was short-lived. Lopukhov retreated and never fully regained his footing as a choreographer. But after Stalin's death, during the Khrushchev "thaw" of the late 1950s and early 1960s, innovation seemed—for a short moment—possible. Artists such as Leonid Yakobson, Igor Belsky, and Yuri Grigorovich challenged the *drambalet*. Picking up where the 1920s had left off (and in the case of Grigorovich, with strong support from Lopukhov), these choreographers sought to re-assert the importance of dance over drama, and to extend the classical vocabulary by melding traditional ballet steps with acrobatic and overtly sensual movements. Yakobson's full-length *Spartacus* (1956), to music by Khatchaturian, was performed without toe shoes and featured languorous movements and prolonged scenes of seduction.

Among these artists, only Grigorovich seems to have consistently satisfied the party (at times only just), and in 1964 he moved to the Bolshoi Ballet in Moscow and became the most prominent choreographer in the Soviet Union. His full evening works, such as his own reworking of *Spartacus* in 1968, were epic ballets on Soviet themes, filled with brutal, physically forced "heroic" dances, passionately performed by formidable male dancers and often featuring a large male corps de ballet.

Yakobson, by contrast, was all but ruined by censorship. A dancer involved in his staging of Alexander Blok's *The Twelve* in 1964 told me that at the end of the ballet a red banner floated across the stage and disappeared into the wings as revolutionary soldiers marched after it. The censors wanted to know why the banner was disappearing: they said it should stay with the soldiers. Natalia Makarova describes the same event in *A Dance Autobiography*, adding that the authorities angrily confronted Yakobson, saying, "What are you up to? Are you mocking us?" and promptly banned the ballet. Yakobson, who was older than Grigorovich and Belsky, had worked with the Kirov on and off since the mid-1920s and had run into trouble with party officials before. One dancer who worked on the choreographer's *Shuraleh* in 1950, for example, recalled that the censors objected to a scene showing a forest fire, which was deemed offensive in the context of Stalin's reforestation project. Yakobson left the Kirov in 1969 to form his own small company, where he worked quietly until his death in 1975.

There were other losses: Rudolf Nureyev defected in 1962, Natalia Makarova in 1970, Mikhail Baryshnikov and Valery Panov in 1974. In 1977, Yuri Soloviev, one of the Kirov's brightest stars, died, reportedly by his own hand; but his mysterious death quickly became a symbol of the ominous forces undermining artistic life in the socialist state. After 1991, things only got worse, with uneven leadership and corruption. In 1995, the Kirov dancer Makhar Vaziev was appointed director of the ballet, where he now works under Valery Gergiev, artistic and general director of the Maryinsky Theater.

II.

OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS, I have spent time with the Kirov in St. Petersburg, London, Graz, and Washington,

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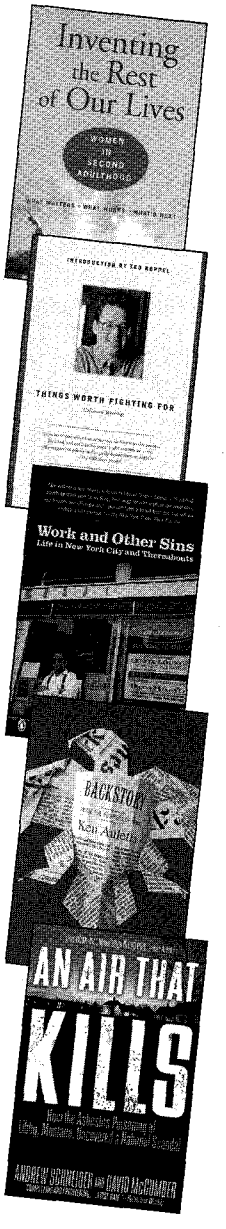

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D.C. As I watched performances and rehearsals and interviewed the company's coaches, dancers, and directors, it became clear to me that under Vaziev's leadership the Kirov is turning its back on its Soviet years, embracing Petipa's imperial legacy, and bringing home Russia's prodigal sons: Fokine, Nijinsky, and Balanchine. Yakobson's *Bedbug* and Belsky's *Leningrad Symphony* were revived in 2001 but are rarely performed, and although established Soviet versions of Petipa's *The Sleeping Beauty* and *La Bayadère* are still in the repertory, they have been upstaged by costly, "authentic" reconstructions of these imperial classics.

Similarly, Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* has been posthumously repatriated with performances of bedrock modernist works such as *The Rite of Spring* and *Les Noces*. And the company has been furiously importing other works created in the West, especially the ballets of St. Petersburg–born George Balanchine. There is much talk of the "Russian Balanchine," and when I spoke with Vaziev he made it clear that he hopes that "the house of Petipa" will soon also be known as "the house of Balanchine." The Kirov also commissions new work, most notably *Cinderella* by Alexei Ratmansky in 2002, which had its American premiere at the Kennedy Center in Washington a few weeks ago.

In short, the Kirov is trying to give itself a new history—the history it might have had but for 1917. Vaziev and many of his ballet masters belong to the Yeltsin generation, and their disdain for the Soviet era is palpable, and understandable. They are too young to have seen original productions of Soviet works of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, but they came of age when the Kirov was languishing and communism was crumbling. In an article published in 1999, Sergei Vikharev, the Kirov ballet master responsible for the recent reconstruction of Petipa's *La Bayadère* (the 1900 version) and *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890), explained:

> I live in a building that was built a year before *Beauty*. I am comfortable in it. Of course, you could say I live in a dump and offer me in exchange one of those concrete buildings on the Avenue of the Bolsheviks ... but I don't want *Beauty* changed into a Stalin building with parquet floors, or a "Khruschchevka" with its modern trash chute, or a Luzhkov "elite" home with an underground garage and security guards.... We want to return to *The Sleeping Beauty* some of its authenticity.

BUT THIS DISMISSAL OF SOVIET aesthetics raises a serious problem. Ballet has no universally accepted standardized notation, and so the "text" of a dance exists in the minds and the bodies of those who perform it. For some modern works, there are films or videotapes of performances or rehearsals, but these are not stable texts: a dancer's mistakes, awkward camera angles, and the reduction of three dimensions to two all make video and film notoriously unreliable. Moreover, they cannot convey the subtleties of technique and style. The "classical tradition" is thus little more than a fragile chain of memories passed down from one generation to the next. Vaziev and his team are breaking the chain and removing many of the Soviet links, yet they depend on teachers and coaches whose careers were made in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. And these Soviet veterans feel that it is the accomplishments of *their* era that are being lost and betrayed, with dire consequences for the future of Russian ballet.

In conversations with many prominent former Kirov dancers, including Gabriella Komleva, Ninela Kurgapkina, and Irina Kolpakova, I was told over and again that in spite of censorship, surveillance, and lack of artistic freedom, the Soviet period was the apotheosis of Russian ballet, a golden era of exceptional artistic achievement. They recall working "communally," with visual artists, designers, dramaturges, and "genius" choreographers such as Zakharov, Yakobson, and Grigorovich. Ballets were lavishly produced, and fans queued for hours to attend important premieres. Dancers had social stature and generous state support. "If it hadn't been for the Soviet system," Kurgapkina insisted, "I would never have become a ballerina." As Kolpakova put it, "we were really happy then. Of course, it was [the] bad Stalinist time ... but for us it was an absolutely unbelievable time."

Many Kirov coaches complain that today's Russian dancers, by contrast, slavishly imitate the "mannerisms" of Western artists. And in their judgment the new "authentic" reconstructions of Petipa's classics that Vaziev has commissioned are "primitive," old-fashioned, and anachronistic. The problem, one senior coach confided, is that the new ballet masters hired by Vaziev are mere "children," "provincials who know nothing" and want to "explode" the Soviet heritage. This impulse, she argues, shows a depressing lack of historical reflection: "We have to keep those things which were achieved. It is like our great revolution of October 1917, in which we destroyed everything. We have to learn not to repeat this mistake."

Many of these artists belonged to the Soviet elite. They have an interest in idealizing the past. Why, then, should we listen to them? One reason is that their artistry is irreproachable: they proved this in their dancing during the Cold War, and as coaches today these former Soviet dancers continue to demonstrate superlative standards. This is not news. Indeed, it is commonplace among Western critics to say that the Soviets produced great dancers—and to insist in the same breath that Soviet choreography was mostly backward and mired in socialist realism.

But can we really separate the dancers so neatly from the choreography they performed? Kirov dancers were not living in a nineteenth-century bubble: their artistic commitment, confidence, and verve were bound up with choreographers such as Zakharov, Yakobson, Sergeyev, and Grigorovich, whose dances were saturated with the passionate claims and cynical compromises required of Soviet ideology. The Soviet era may not have been "golden" at the Kirov, but we cannot ignore its force and its importance in forming several generations of truly great dancers. And now nostalgia for that past is playing a role. The disagreement of these former Soviet dancers with Vaziev and Vikharev over what to keep and what to discard from the Soviet past is not just sour grapes: it is the key to what is happening on the Kirov stage today.

III.

ALTHOUGH THE COMPANY'S new programming faces West, the Kirov does still regularly perform two important *drambalets* from the 1930s and 1940s, as well as several Soviet-era versions of Petipa's ballets, including *Swan Lake*. Vaziev says he maintains the *drambalets* because they train dancers to act; Vikharev told me that they were "created on the remains of imperial culture" and thus have an organic connection to Petipa's full-length dramatic narratives. That is, they are the most un-Soviet of the Soviet ballets.

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But are they? *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, an early *drambalet* based on Pushkin's poem and premiered in 1934 with music by Boris Asafiev and choreography by Rostislav Zakharov, was a watershed socialist realist production. Zakharov was trained by Radlov and devoted whole rehearsals to "table work" à la Stanislavsky, in which the dancers (including Sergeyev and Ulanova) were asked to analyze the psychological motives of each character in the ballet. Zakharov went on to become a prominent choreographer and official advocate of *drambalet*. And *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* was enormously successful: for decades it was staged in theaters across the Soviet bloc, and it remains a staple in St. Petersburg today. An emblem of Stalinist taste and culture, it is the Maryinsky's Soviet face. As such, it seems to have been slated for domestic (and tourist) consumption and is rarely performed in the West. I saw it in St. Petersburg.

The ballet tells the story of Maria, the daughter of a Polish nobleman, held captive by a Crimean khan who has fallen in love with her virginal beauty. Zarema, the khan's main lover in his harem, is consumed with jealousy. She confronts and finally kills the innocent girl. The enraged khan orders Zarema's death and erects a "fountain of tears" to the memory of his beloved Maria. The choreography is unabashed melodrama: brash, blaring, drum-rolling music; smoke, flashing lights, fierce battle, dead bodies strewn across the stage. The khan's warriors are stomping, athletic, cape-bearing heathens; his harem is full of undulating, lusty women who stand in sharp contrast to Maria's elegant white simplicity. When the hot-blooded Zarema stabs Maria in a fit of passion, we watch the life drain from Maria's fragile body in a lyrical dance: her death is a victory, a sacrifice of life for an ideal of purity.

Many Soviet ballets mixed refined classical vocabulary with folk forms and overwrought melodrama to create a didactic allegory. Lavrovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* (1940), another famous *drambalet* still in the Kirov repertory, was envisaged by Radlov, who first worked on the ballet with Prokofiev, as a "Komsomol-like" story of "young, strong, and progressive people fighting with feudal traditions." Today, the message of the ballet has slipped toward caricature: Lavrovsky's choreography shows the crass, power-hungry Capulets and Montagues conniving, grimacing, and gesticulating while Romeo and Juliet demonstrate the power of innocent love in sweet, classical pas de deux. When the fated lovers die, the warring clans weep and shake their fists in rage: before the curtain falls they embrace in a reconciliation that seems more knowing and celebratory than tragic.

Today's dancers do not shy away from the arch gestures and cape-swirling, knife-wielding numbers of these ballets. And they are beautifully trained dancers, in the Vaganova tradition: for them, an arabesque is not merely a step to be executed, but a spiritually infused dramatic form. Their passionate, melodramatic dancing reminds us of the indelible mark that *drambalet* made on Russian classicism: even strident ballets such as *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* had an authenticity born of strong belief—the conviction that this was a new form of dramatic dance. These ballets were not subtle, but they had an emotional urgency and power, in spite of their limited choreographic language.

But watching such ballets now is an odd experience: passionate, lamenting, and vehement, many also appear hollow, dated, and at moments ridiculous. Today's *Fountain of Bakhchisarai* is not unlike the massive and overbearing statue of Lenin that continues to harangue passersby from its perch on one of St. Petersburg's main thoroughfares. The dancers have lived with the ballet for so long that it has become second nature: it is their heritage. But like the statue, the *Fountain of Bakhchisarai* now also comes across as a parody of its own intensely held beliefs.

SERGEI VIKHAREV HAS CHOSEN a much cooler approach in his reconstruction of Petipa's nineteenth-century classic *La Bayadère*, with music by Minkus. Petipa first staged the ballet for the Imperial Court in 1877, and re-worked it in 1884 and again in 1900. After his death, *La Bayadère* was re-staged several times, first in the 1920s (when the fourth act was dropped), then in 1941 by Vladimir Ponomarev and Vakhtang Chabukiani, who cast the work in the melodramatic and bravura mold of *Bakhchisarai*. These and subsequent versions were choreographed "after Petipa,"

Drinking in the Daytime

Anything is better than this
Bliss.
Nursing on a long-stemmed bubble made of crystal.
I'm sucking on the barrel of a crystal pistol
To get a bullet to my brain.
I'm gobbling a breast, drinking myself down the drain.

I'm in such a state of Haut-Brion I can't resist.
A fist-fucking anus swallowing a fist.
You're wondering why I talk this way, so daintily!
I'll tell you after I take a pee.
Now I'm back.
Oilcoholics love the breast they attack.

I'm talking about the way poetry made me free.
It's treated me very well, you see.
I climbed up inside the Statue of Liberty
In the days when you could still go up in the torch,
and that was me.
I mean every part I play.
I'm drinking my lunch at Montrachet.

I'm a case of Haut-Brion turning into tar.
I'm talking about the recent war.
It's a case of having to raise your hand in life to be
Recognized so you can ask your question. *Mr. Secretary!*
Mr. Secretary!
To the Secretary of Defense, I say:
I lift my tar to you at Montrachet!

I lift my lamp beside the golden door to pee,
And make a vow to make men free, and we will find
their W.M.D.
Sir, I supported the war.
I believe in who we are.
I dedicate red wine to that today.
At Montrachet, near the Franklin Street stop,
on West Broadway.

FREDERICK SEIDEL

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keeping a core of the choreography but modernizing the production to meet Soviet tastes and ideological requirements. In 1948, Nikolai Zubkovsky added and danced the famous Golden Idol variation, and in 1954 Kirov director Konstantin Sergeyev made his own revisions. Makarova and Nureyev each mounted a full-length production in the West, in 1980 and 1992 respectively.

Vikharev, by contrast, has tried to retrieve Petipa's original. His research has been exhaustive, drawing on a range of sources, including a script of the choreography made by the dancer Nikolai Sergeyev and others in 1900–1903, in a since-defunct notation system. The result is unadulterated spectacle: a sumptuous four-hour parade of Oriental-style costumes, sets, dances, and mime, unfolding in an aura of dreamy otherworldliness. Elephants, tigers, snake charmers, "infernal" dancers, flower-garlanded children flow across the stage in a moving tapestry of bright color and fairy-tale design. We know many of the classical variations, which were passed down largely intact and can be seen in other Soviet and Western productions of the ballet. What is new here, unfortunately, are divertissements with predictable and simplistic steps, strung together with lengthy and incomprehensible mimed exegeses.

This taste for spectacle changes the drama of the ballet in telling ways. In the Soviet versions of *La Bayadère*, the story unfolds as follows: Solor, a young high-caste warrior, swears eternal love to the temple dancer, Nikiya. His marriage to the noble Gamzatti, however, has been arranged, and the young warrior finds himself torn between social duty and his love for Nikiya. Meanwhile a deadly snake is planted in Nikiya's basket of flowers: she is bitten and dies. Devastated, Solor takes solace in an opium-induced sleep and dreams of descending to the underworld, to the Kingdom of the Shades.

This famous scene is the dramatic pivot of the ballet: Solor enters the underworld, where he encounters a group of pristine women, all gauze and white, who wind their way across the stage through a Himalayan mist. Their dance is rigorously classical: symmetrical, proportioned, and lyrical, it uses the vocabulary of ballet to convey the stark beauty and strict discipline required of ideal love. Repentant and purified, Solor is reconciled with his beloved Nikiya, and the ballet ends with the couple framed by the pure white shades in an ideal world of harmony and beauty.

In his reconstruction, Vikharev reproduces the steps of the Kingdom of the Shades, but he eviscerates the moral content: his shades are merely ornamental. The dancers' arms and backs breathe with feeling, but their loyalty to Petipa's style seems nostalgic rather than dramatically charged. The moral of this *Bayadère* comes later, in the newly restored final act. Awakened from his dream of the shades, Solor prepares to marry the beautiful princess Gamzatti, but as he takes his vows, the gods wreak their revenge: thunder and lightning strike, and the palace is destroyed. The shade of Nikiya, however, raises her faithless lover from the rubble, and they pose in a rain of shimmering gold—liberated by the destruction of the world they once knew.

If the lovers are liberated from the past, the ballet is not. In striking ways, this new *Bayadère* is a mirror image of its Soviet predecessor: heroic, bravura dancing gives way to trivial divertissements and mincing steps; and psychological intensity is traded for mime and formal processions. The ballet lacks dramatic unity. It is instead a sprawling collection of "authentic" steps, costumes, sets, and props imbued with a connoisseur's nostalgia. For the dancers, this is confusing: some complain that the ballet is dramatically murky, and indeed on stage we see them struggle to infuse their roles with psychological motives and *drambalet*-style purpose. But their passionate outbursts have little place in this *Bayadère*, which is not about anything but its own grandeur.

It is important to be clear about what Vikharev is doing. He is not just looking to the past for inspiration, but using the past to justify turning the classical tradition toward procession, mime, pomp and circumstance. There is nothing approaching a stable "text" or "score" of steps for *La Bayadère*, and judging the accuracy of Sergeyev's notes is impossible. There are blank spots, moreover, where the sources simply fall silent, leaving Vikharev to fill in the void. "Reconstructing" a lost ballet is an anachronism, and the brittle, spiritless quality of this *Bayadère* must be attributed to Vikharev, not Petipa.

IV.

If *La Bayadère* tells us something about contemporary Russian nostalgia for an imagined imperial past, the Kirov's recent performances of ballets from the Diaghilev era represent a leap into an even less accessible aesthetic world—and remind us of just how far Soviet and Western dance traditions diverged in the course of the twentieth century. Consider *Les Noces*, choreographed in 1923 by Nijinska to a propulsive score by Stravinsky with sets and costumes by Natalia Goncharova. The ballet portrays a village wedding, but this is no joyous celebration of young love. Rather, the participants are stoic victims of an unforgiving social ritual: bride and groom are torn from their families and thrust upon each other. The villagers move together as an undifferentiated mass, driven by Stravinsky's unrelenting rhythms. Dressed in drab brown-and-white skirts and pants, their mechanical, repetitive steps are heavily weighted and unballetic. Elbows jut out, feet turn in, and toe shoes dig into the floor. Premiered in Paris not long after the Russian Revolution, the ballet was a fierce portrayal of the static forces in peasant culture.

Until 2003, *Les Noces* had never been performed by the Kirov, and Soviet dancers had no experience with its style. When the company premiered its production in London, I was struck by how lost the Russian dancers appeared when faced with the ballet's austere demands. Stravinsky's syncopation and Nijinska's movement force dancers to cut jumps short and pull them sharply down, but the Kirov dancers have a high and light center of gravity and are constantly caught "up" in midair. They shuffle across the surface of the music and never submit to its rhythmic inevitability. Moreover, the dramatic and expressive character of their dancing prevents them from erasing themselves and showing the sacrifice of individual desire to social ritual, which is the ballet's main purpose. We know it can be otherwise: Nijinska revived *Les Noces* for the Royal Ballet in 1966, and that production remains a

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marvel of taut precision and riveting dramatic tension.

The Rite of Spring presents even graver problems. This pivotal modernist work, which premiered in Paris in 1913 with music by Stravinsky and sets by Roerich, was a stylized, primitivist portrait of pagan Russia. It was meant, Nijinsky wrote, to be "a jolting and emotional experience." But *The Rite of Spring* had only eight performances ever, and the choreography disappeared. In the 1970s, the American scholar Millicent Hodson, working with the designer Kenneth Archer, decided to reconstruct the work. Since there was no record of the choreography, Hodson used Stravinsky's annotated score, interviews, reviews, and contemporary sketches, and essentially re-choreographed the ballet, following Nijinsky's ideas as she understood them. Their version was first performed by the Joffrey Ballet in 1987 and was mounted on the Kirov in 2003.

Hodson's choreography consists of ritualized stomping, sharply angled elbows, and flinging, inarticulate movements. The dancers plod dutifully through her lifeless steps, and what was by all accounts a radical and shocking work comes across as tame and kitschy: a picture postcard from the past. Had the Kirov really wanted to retrieve something of the original force and rigor of *The Rite of Spring*—had it wanted to pay homage to the iconoclastic spirit of modernism—it might have abandoned Nijinsky and commissioned new choreography. But this would not have served what was surely the Kirov's real purpose: to bring Nijinsky home.

Mikhail Fokine's *Chopiniana*, on the other hand, comes naturally to the company's dancers, perhaps because it is not a "reconstruction" of some imagined past, but a ballet that has a long history at the Kirov. Premiered at the Maryinsky Theater in 1908 and revived by Vaganova in 1931, the ballet is a pathos-filled evocation of the Romantic era in France. The Kirov dancers respond to its stillness and its simple, ethereal quality as few can. They take their time, hover on toe, hands cupped to their ears listening for woodland spirits. Their flawless devotion to the Romantic style elevates the ballet from a stiff period piece to an absorbing study in lyricism.

And what of Balanchine? Here, the Kirov artists triumph, but not because they have some intuitive, native St. Petersburgian insight into his ballets. Indeed, it is the way that the company brings Soviet-era traditions to bear on Balanchine's great works that transforms the ballets in surprising and interesting ways. *Jewels*, a triptych that pays homage to three facets of classicism, was created by Balanchine in 1967 for the New York City Ballet. The first section, *Emeralds*, to music by Fauré, is a warm evocation of the French aristocratic style; the choreography is elegant, ornamented, and, as Balanchine once said, "perfumed." The Kirov dancers bring a sweeter, peasant-girl innocence to the movement: theirs is a tribute to the French tradition they know, to the simple, heartfelt movements of *Giselle*, which idealized peasant life and became an emblem of Soviet ballet.

The second movement, *Rubies*, to music by Stravinsky, is American jazz-age sheen: hip-thrusting, off-balance, syncopated. At the Kirov, however, *Rubies* is kitsch: exotic, seductive, boisterously rebellious. Balanchine's sense of irony is lost, and exuberance sometimes pushes into recklessness and bad taste. And yet in their own way the dancers use the ballet's distortions to free themselves from classical restraints. *Diamonds*, the final movement to music by Tchaikovsky, is a tribute to imperial grandeur and the Russian style, but it is also very American, tinged with Hollywood glamour and wit. But the Kirov dances *Diamonds* with the heightened dramatic intensity characteristic of its Soviet-era tradition: Odette, set free.

Many of Balanchine's works are acquiring new life at the Kirov: *Serenade*, *Symphony in C*, *Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux*, *Apollo*, *Prodigal Son*, *La Valse*, *The Four Temperaments* are all performed by the company today. Wisely, Vaziev has chosen Balanchine ballets with strong dramatic undertones and transparent classical form, which has made it possible for his dancers to use their own traditions to find a way into Balanchine's world. And the artists of the George Balanchine Trust who staged these works at the Kirov have let the dancers be themselves, within the bounds of the choreography. Balanchine's dances also teach, and when the Kirov dancers do *Rubies* they are learning about his neo-classicism, even as they reshape it to their own style. Watching these Russians perform Balanchine gives the lie to lifeless historical "reconstructions." The Kirov does not need a new past: it just needs great ballets.

That is why the Kirov's new *Cinderella* was so keenly anticipated. The choreographer, Alexei Ratmansky, is young but has wide-ranging experience. Trained at the Bolshoi in Moscow, he has also worked with the Royal Danish and Royal Winnipeg Ballet companies and with many Western European choreographers. (He was recently appointed artistic director of the Bolshoi Ballet.) And for the Kirov *Cinderella* is a telling choice: with a score by Prokofiev, it was first performed at the Bolshoi in 1945 with choreography by Zakharov, and then at the Kirov in 1946 with choreography by Konstantin Sergeyev. A classically danced hearth-conquers-ballroom fairy tale, it became a touchstone of Soviet ballet, and remained in the repertory for over fifty years.

What does Ratmansky do with this legacy? Unfortunately, he retreats into irony, and disparages the classical tradition upon which he might have built. In this *Cinderella*, the "hearth" is a blank stage flanked by industrial fire escapes with a backdrop that looks like corrugated metal, the ballroom a mere etched blueprint of a seventeenth-century interior, rather than the real thing. The stepmother and stepsisters are vulgar orange- and pink-haired punks, the father a drunk, the fairy godmother a "fairy-tramp." The courtiers are crass and slinky (new Russians?), garbed in fluorescent colors. Mohawks abound. There are various prostitutes (male and female), and endless cartoon-like dances, full of self-consciously turned-in, broken-up steps and stylized arms. These awkward and uncoordinated movements accentuate the dissonance of Prokofiev's score while ignoring its lyrical undercurrents.

Cinderella herself is cast as a demure ballet girl in leotard, pink tights, and leg-warmers. She alone has classical steps.

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The prince, arrogant and strutting, is an unlikely lover (and seems more interested in the gay prostitutes than in Cinderella). But, following the script, they fall in love and dance a romantic pas de deux. The message, I suppose, is that ballet, like true love, redeems all. But does it? Both of Ratmansky's dances for the young lovers are conventional and clichéd, replete with ice-skating leaps into ecstatic swirls and dreamy-eyed embraces. Ratmansky is not really interested in ballet or in *Cinderella*; he is too taken with his "concept," and with the goofy movements of his courtiers. The consequences are serious: he starves the dancers choreographically and emotionally and leaves the audience with an empty shell of a ballet.

THIS WILL NOT SUSTAIN US—or the Kirov. Nor, unfortunately, will most Soviet-era works, which lack the open quality of enduring classics. Their socialist gloss and their embattled place in Russian history make it unlikely that, however well revived, they can speak to a contemporary audience. The impulse to moor Russian ballet to a more usable past is understandable, and the scale and magnitude of the Kirov's historical reconstructions of Petipa's work in particular are impressive. But artistically, the new productions of *La Bayadère* and *The Rite of Spring* (along with *The Sleeping Beauty* and others) weaken the classical and modernist traditions that they purport to revive. Like richly decorated Potemkin villages, they are powerful political symbols but empty and insubstantial art.

The irony is that behind this Potemkin façade lies a strong classical tradition. The current generation of dancers, younger than Vaziev and Vikharev, seem to have embraced the dramatic urgency and technical rigor bequeathed them by the Soviet era. Watch Andrian Fadeyev throw himself to his knees before his Juliet, Diana Vishneva abandon herself to Juliet's desperate passion, Daria Pavlenko dive into a deep white swan *arabesque penchée*, Sofia Gumerova find the dark musical undercurrent in Fauré's *Emeralds*, Natalia Sologub open her arms toward heaven in *Serenade*: these performers do not shy away from suffusing movement with strong feelings, and they are often physically freer than their American and Western European counterparts. Perhaps the fact that they never experienced communism works in their favor. For them, the legacy may be simpler, its faded ideological content no longer an encumbrance.

Fourteen years after the fall of the Soviet Union, the Maryinsky/Kirov is establishing itself at the forefront of classical ballet. There are many problems, but the company is striking out in bold directions, and it has a deep tradition to draw from. The danger lies in the desire to retreat into ersatz imperial grandeur, and the impulse to elevate cynicism about the Soviet past into an artistic creed. This would be unfortunate, for ballet is an idealistic art form, and one that depends—perhaps more than any other—on how its artists treat their history. For better and for worse, the Kirov is the only tradition the Maryinsky has got. ■

Ingrid D. Rowland

Keeping Her Head

LUCREZIA BORGIA: LIFE, LOVE AND DEATH IN RENAISSANCE ITALY
By Sarah Bradford
(Viking, 421 pp., $27.95)

LUCREZIA BORGIA OUGHT TO be a biographer's dream. The lurid contours of her life are real enough: daughter of a licentious Spanish pope, sister to Machiavelli's sinister hero Cesare Borgia, before she was twenty she had seen her first husband divorced on charges of impotence and her second husband murdered in the Vatican, quite possibly with Cesare's connivance. In her glittering violent world, there are tantalizing layers of myth to be separated from reality; the rumors of incest with her father and with Cesare, the Vatican banquet with fifty naked prostitutes chasing after chestnuts on all fours, and the poisonings that Donizetti portrays so gleefully in his nineteenth-century opera are all false, but they clamor for retelling even as they are refuted.

Lucrezia's father knew her better than her detractors; he described her late in his life as his favorite child, because she had always obeyed his orders. And this very obedience explains why such a promising subject turns out in the end to be a biographer's dilemma. For Lucrezia Borgia's considerable virtues were quiet virtues, expressed with diplomatic reserve: the virtues of compliance rather than defiance. Unlike her male relatives and her sister-in-law Sancia, she was no black-haired Spanish spitfire. She was a cool-headed blonde who managed somehow to survive the schemings of her father and brother to end her days as a pious, civic-minded duchess in the northern Italian court of Ferrara.

Her gift in a dramatic, cruel age was to live undramatically. Inevitably, therefore, like her bossy, tiresome sister-in-law Isabella d'Este, she seems a pallid figure next to the lusty women who animate the English Renaissance. If Elizabeth I commanded the events around her with her huge personality, Lucrezia Borgia let events play out around her, charming by all accounts, sage on most occasions, but famously elusive, a reticent blonde rather than a fiery, articulate redhead. Contemporaries noted her "remote and solitary nature."

Sarah Bradford's new biography does its resolute best to focus on Lucrezia herself rather than the flashy men who surrounded her, but it is not easy to bring forth a personality so practiced in the art of self-concealment. Bradford herself was attracted to Cesare as a subject for biography long before taking on the sister whom he exploited so callously throughout his life. Inevitably we see Lucrezia as others saw her, and their reports, unless they are scurrilous fiction, are complimentary, but unexcitingly so. She reflects, perfectly, the limitations placed on women in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy, especially the aristocratic women whose chief purposes in life were to marry well and to produce male heirs.

Since women made up half the population of Renaissance Italy, their stories

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surely need to be told; but, like women in ancient Athens, Italian women of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were hemmed in by increasingly restricted social roles and limited education. Their lives, at any point on the economic scale, were usually hard, monotonous, and depressing. (And not only to a modern reader: a Sienese chronicle that coincides almost exactly with Lucrezia Borgia's lifetime shows how frequently girls and women killed themselves in that central Italian city.)

Tellingly, Bradford notes that when Lucrezia left Rome for her third marriage in Ferrara, a small city in the broad delta of the river Po, her trousseau included some fifteen books. She was, then, no ignoramus, but her nemesis Julius II—who famously said of himself "I'm no scholar"—lived amid a collection of three hundred volumes, not to mention the Vatican Library.

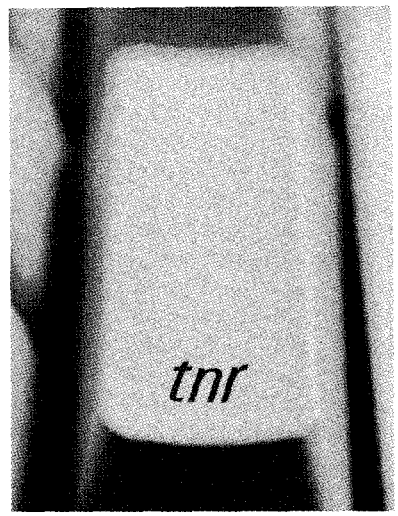
Lucrezia Borgia, a woman of extraordinary privilege, belonged therefore to a completely different order of being from Elizabeth I or Lady Jane Grey, with their Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, and incomparably rich Shakespearean English, languages in which these remarkable Englishwomen read and conversed on a wealth of subjects, including philosophy and theology as well as the concrete concerns of daily life. Italy, the best-developed capitalist culture of the era, had already transformed Lucrezia and her like into commodities who duly bartered with God for the salvation of their souls as they bartered with one another for goods, services, friendships, and marriages. (As Bradford portrays her, Lucrezia's mother, the Roman innkeeper Vannozza Cattanei, nurtured more interest in earning money than in the welfare of the children she entrusted to their father's care. She used her position as a cardinal's lover to set herself up as a successful businesswoman.)

The demands of high society's marketplace seem to have left the scheming women of the ruling class little time for musing, or for questioning; Lucrezia herself must have confined whatever metaphysical or rebellious thoughts she had to her prayers. Even her romance with the Venetian poet Pietro Bembo is meager stuff when we read their letters to each other, and not only because their flirtation on her part was adulterous and therefore carefully controlled. Bembo's love letters to Lucrezia, like those to his Venetian mistress Maria Savorgnan, center with such relentless concentration on himself that only another narcissist would see much charm in them. (Byron found them so captivating that he stole a lock of Lucrezia's golden hair from the folds of one missive.) The Venetians who repeatedly rejected this garrulous swain for public office sensed that there was something not quite right about Pietro Bembo, who found himself in Ferrara's small feudal court because he could not hold his own in a republic.

Today Ferrara, where Lucrezia Borgia lived out the second half of her life, is a tiny jewel of a city, but neighboring Mantua may provide a more telling picture of life in these northern Italian courts—and proof, if any were still needed, that feudalism was always a rotten system of government. Three iron cages decorate the blank brick façade of Mantua's ducal palace, and another sits halfway up the towering spire of city hall. In the latter, drunks were displayed for public ridicule as they dried out suspended fifty feet above the piazza, with vertigo and the effects of exposure to add to their hangovers.

The Gonzaga family reserved the outdoor cages on the front of their palazzo for criminals of a more exalted sort: assassins, spies, inconvenient relatives. The elements could provide punishment as vicious as the crowds below. As Bradford reminds her readers, the Renaissance coincided with the period of cooling known as the "Little Ice Age"; those layers of linen, brocade, and fur we see in portraits of the Borgias, d'Estes, and Gonzagas did real work, and the reason the knightly St. Martin offered a naked beggar only half of his cloak was that he needed the other half to keep from freezing to death himself. A few winter days in these cages could be deadly; usually, however, the prisoner was kept there only for a bit of public humiliation, performing all his bodily functions in plain sight before being taken out to endure the equally public rituals of execution. The interior of Mantua's Palazzo Ducale has gorgeous frescoes by Pisanello and Andrea Mantegna, but the cages say as much about the Gonzagas as the paintings, and perhaps say it more honestly.

Even Ferrara's pretty red-brick castle, in Lucrezia's time, became the prison for two of her brothers-in-law, who were



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confined separately in one of its corner towers. They had conspired to assassinate their two elder brothers, Duke Ercole (Lucrezia's husband) and Cardinal Scipione. One of the would-be assassins, Giulio, died in his tower after thirty-four years of captivity; the other, Guido, was released at the age of eighty-one after fifty-three years of confinement, still dressed in the clothing of half a century before. Yet the public life of people like Lucrezia Borgia provided its own kind of prison; ironically, when she wanted to escape the confines of her worldly life, she fled to the convents of cloistered nuns, the only places she seems to have felt free from the connivings of everyone around her.

Several earlier biographers of Lucrezia Borgia chose to treat her life as a historical novel, hauntingly so in the case of the mid-twentieth-century Italian writer Maria Bellonci, whose *Lucrezia Borgia* invests the physical objects that so obsessed these early modern capitalists with piercing psychological force. Lucrezia clearly devoted much of her energy to dresses, silver, draperies, cosmetics, and redecorating her living quarters, and by choosing to write fiction Bellonci made the detailing of a gown become a metaphor of the wearer's psychic state: in her hands, the confinement of stiff brocades pierced by slashes and lace-trimmed linens itself becomes an image of repressed passion, desire peeking through the dazzling surfaces, whether it is in a fraught meeting between Lucrezia and her brother-in-law and probable longtime lover, the ugly, virile Francesco Gonzaga, or at a ball where human destinies will be decided in between the pavanes and saltarellos. Bellonci's several novels about the hothouse courts of the northern Italian Renaissance—*Secrets of the Gonzaga*, *Private Renaissance*—all have a tangible melancholy to them, helped along by the dense mist that rises up from the wetlands of the Po Valley to shroud Ferrara and Mantua in winter. As a novelist of remarkable insight, Bellonci succeeded in diving through the fog right to the emotional forces that drove her characters' opulent, violent lives.

Bradford, on the other hand, has chosen to write straight biography rather than a biographical novel, using her careful researches in the archives of Mantua, Rome, and London, especially among the letters written by Lucrezia and the members of her household. As elaborately coded as dress, this correspondence tends to document events and relationships rather than psychological states; certainly neither Cesare Borgia nor his father saw any advantage to candor. Bradford retells Machiavelli's famous story of the invitation Cesare Borgia extended in 1501 to a series of lords, asking them to join him in the castle of Senigallia. Olivierotto da Fermo, Vitellozzo Vitelli, and Paolo Orsini were among those who accepted; wily Pandolfo Petrucci declined, and thus avoided the other invitees' fate of being tied up in pairs and garroted by Cesare's trusty, Don Michele da Coroglio. In a subsequent letter to the city council of Siena, still preserved in the local archive, Cesare comes as close to candor as he ever did in his life, declaring, "If by the time you have received this letter you have not expelled Pandolfo Petrucci from your borders, I will proceed to destroy your lands, your houses, your families, and your persons, and you will thank me for teaching you this valuable lesson, namely, not to give in to tyrants." (Once again, Pandolfo eluded Cesare's machinations; he would die, an old man, in his own bed, and earn his own complement of praise from Machiavelli.) The webs of machination sometimes entangled the very Borgia spiders who wove them.

Through documents, Bradford also tracks Lucrezia's brittle dealings with her sister-in-law Isabella d'Este, as well as Isabella's irrepressible jealousy of her more attractive neighbor. Lucrezia Borgia herself responded to the maelstrom around her by detaching herself from it and hiding away, using all her Borgia cleverness to cover her tracks. No single document, no run of documents even, can really tell the story of her marriage to Alfonso d'Este, the unwilling soldier bridegroom who eventually enjoyed nothing so much as an evening by the fire with his wife and children around him. Domestic bliss is not the usual stuff of drama, Renaissance or otherwise.

And yet Lucrezia Borgia's conquest of Alfonso d'Este's rugged heart surely ranks as a piece of siegecraft at least on a par with her brother's famous conquest of Imola and that city's ruling hellion, Caterina Sforza (a story Bradford barely tells here because she has already given it ample play in her biography of Cesare). If anything, Lucrezia's achievement is the greater: her conquest was permanent, Cesare's momentary; hers the result of a long, patient strategy, Cesare's of a lightning whim. In her Machiavellian world, she exerted eminently un-Machiavellian energies: as her father and brother (and Isabella d'Este) intrigued, Lucrezia, like the Virgin Mary, interceded.

The letter in which Lucrezia refuses to obey her husband's order to torture a criminal may come as close as any of her surviving correspondence to the source of her irresistible pull on the hearts of nearly everyone who met her: for all the shallowness, snobbery, and cruelty that her age tried to force upon her, she must have been an actively gentle soul, as soothing to the troubled spirits around her as the saintly nuns she collected with the same avidity that she expended on tapestries and musicians. Her most hostile adversaries, such as Isabella d'Este's garrulous informant Bernardino Di Prosperi, who was instructed to report back Lucrezia's every failing to his mean-spirited mistress, always came under her spell sooner or later. From the outset, Di Prosperi reported that "she speaks as modestly as possible," and praised her "goodness and prudence" and "kind way of speaking." By the time of Lucrezia's final illness seventeen years later, he reported that "all the city will greatly grieve if she were to die," clearly including himself.

As Bradford takes pains to demonstrate, Lucrezia's nearly infallible charm was not a matter of simple passivity. She did not mirror and flatter self-centered men, like some patient Griselda. She retained her own tastes, her hopes, her predilections, and her peculiarities, which included rising late and refusing many an evening invitation with the excuse that she needed to wash her hair (an elaborate process that also involved, as Bradford suggests, touching up its golden sheen). She fought for her desires as tenaciously as the men around her, and gave up only when she had no other realistic choice. Most tragically, marriage to

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Alfonso, her third husband, meant separation from her eldest son, who provided awkwardly tangible proof that the bride had been no virgin when Alfonso married her. Lucrezia never forgot the boy for an instant; she made him suits of clothing and wrote to him faithfully for the rest of his brief life.

Her presence, then, was an active force, but a force that narrative describes only with difficulty. Bradford demonstrates Lucrezia's appeal largely by quoting people who said she was appealing; there is little else to do when the appeal was obviously so intimately personal. There were not many souls as gracious as she in her time, or in her circles; most contemporary saints were as hard-headed as the sinners they aimed to reform, and most aristocrats were appallingly irresponsible. Most of the men close to her, for all their swashbuckling, were probably as dull as her gossipy ladies-in-waiting, although their clashes may have had more obvious political effect. Bradford's effort to focus on Lucrezia's genteel diplomacy marks a significant departure from Machiavelli's cynical take on many of the same events, and makes it all the more distressing that a woman of this intelligence and spirit should have been relegated by her family and her society to so circumscribed a life. ■

Alan Mintz
Group Therapy

JEWS AND THE AMERICAN SOUL: HUMAN NATURE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
By Andrew R. Heinze
(Princeton University Press, 438 pp., $29.95)

IN 1946, JOSHUA LOTH LIEBMAN, a Reform rabbi in Boston who had enjoyed success as a radio preacher, published *Peace of Mind*, a book of advice about how to achieve psychic health, which sold many millions of copies before and after his death from a heart attack two years later. From its unctuous title, Liebman's volume might be taken to be just another spoonful of snake oil from the bottomless bottle that ministers to the unending American thirst for self-help and self-improvement. Yet the actual message of *Peace of Mind* comes as a surprise. Distilling the wisdom of many years spent in psychoanalytic treatment, Liebman sets out a rigorous set of truths. You can escape your guilt, unfulfillment, and malaise, he tells his readers, only if you are willing to do the hard work of facing your inner conflicts, understanding your early deprivations, and accepting the reality of your desires. Do not idealize selfless love, cautioned Liebman, for self-love and self-acceptance are the prerequisites to the genuine love of others, enabling us to fulfill the precept to "love thy neighbor as thyself." The new psychiatry is a gift to religion rather than its undoing, the rabbi argued, and only by heeding its insights can religion remain relevant and modern man achieve a new relationship with God.

The extraordinary success of *Peace of Mind* underscores two significant developments in mid-twentieth-century American culture. Psychoanalysis, which had earlier conquered professional psychiatric circles, now achieved popular acceptance as the dominant explanation for the workings of the human soul. More curiously, the good news was delivered to the American public by a rabbi who made no secret of his Jewish learning. For Andrew R. Heinze, in his ambitious and flawed book, this is no coincidence. Coming at the midpoint of the great modern century, Liebman's book is the centerpiece of a grand narrative, which begins with Freud and ends with Dr. Joyce Brothers, about how the popularizing energies of Jewish psychologists succeeded in transforming how most Americans think about the self. That many of the figures who fomented this revolution were Jewish is self-evident. The question is whether the fact of their Jewishness is truly meaningful or merely the by-product of marginality and social location.

THE CRISIS IN AMERICAN CULTURE that allowed the new psychology in the door was very real indeed. Until the end of the nineteenth century, philosophy and religion had provided the American public with a credible and productive set of ideas about how life should be lived. Philosophy especially had served as a lively and open avocation for the citizens of the new republic as well as an intellectual venue in which to explore questions of morality, virtue, and responsibility. By World War I, American philosophy had retreated from public discourse and entered the universities, becoming a formal academic discipline that was preoccupied with technical issues of logic and epistemology. Religion, for its part, had never ceased offering practical advice about the right path for men and women to tread in this world and the next, but, except in rural America, the plausibility of the message had collapsed. The velocity of change in the industrial cities, with their swelling and restless populations, had produced a sense of anxiety and dislocation that could not be assuaged by the old conceptions of sin and salvation.

The new psychology was now poised to step in where others had failed. The old psychiatry had been based on the assumption that most mental afflictions were due to lesions in the brain or organic defects in the nervous system, and to combat them doctors prescribed cures based on rest, nerve tonics, electricity, massage, nutrition, and—the old standby—will power. The new psychology presented itself as an empirical science based on new discoveries in Germany and Austria, and it explained mental suffering as the result of inner psychic conflicts, of which physical ills were symptoms but not causes. These conflicts had clear etiologies and developed according to discoverable rules, and by careful observation of these dynamic forces psychotherapies had been developed that claimed to bring dramatic relief from obdurate sources of mental anguish. The new psychology, writes Heinze, "allowed Americans to combine the age-old desire for miraculous healing with

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a belief in the importance of scientific credibility."

THE SUBSTANCE OF THESE NEW discoveries holds less interest for Heinze than the exuberance of their propagation. He finds a common thread among the leading figures of the first generation, which included Hugo Munsterberg, Joseph Jastrow, Isador Coriat, Abraham Myerson, A. A. Brill, and Walter Beran Wolfe. In addition to pre-eminence in scientific research, clinical practice, and medical training, each was passionately devoted to popularizing the ideas of the new psychology and making them easily available to the American public. They possessed a proselytizing confidence in the power of their new tools and new theories that fully matched the thirst of the American audience for advice on how to live in the modern world with less anxious guilt and more fulfillment.

Consider the example of Joseph Jastrow. Jastrow received a doctorate from Johns Hopkins in 1886 and began a long career at the University of Wisconsin, where he built one of the nation's first psychological laboratories. (While all the figures mentioned above are Jewish, Jastrow is Heinze's poster boy for his thesis about the Jewishness of the new psychology. His father was Marcus Jastrow, a prominent Philadelphia rabbi who composed the dictionary of Talmudic Aramaic that is still in use today, and his sister-in-law was Henrietta Szold, the founder of Hadassah.) In his academic work, Jastrow was interested in shared features of animal and human behavior and helped establish the field of comparative psychology in the United States. But he also had an allied career as a syndicated advice columnist, and, speaking to the public on NBC from 1935 to 1938, he was one of the nation's first radio psychologists. The titles of his many books suggest the confident ambitions of his profession: *Keeping Mentally Fit, Piloting Your Life, Effective Thinking,* and *Sanity First: The Art of Sensible Living.* "We have arrived at a psychological age," he announced. "Morals and good citizenship haven't retired, but they are viewed as conditioned upon mental fitness.... Mental hygiene projects the program of right living with the psychologist at the helm."

IN ADDITION TO DISPENSING ADvice on mental fitness, these new helmsmen of the soul made an impact on the public discussion of significant social issues. Franz Boas's student Otto Klineberg launched an effective critique of the racialist underpinnings of the intelligence-testing movement, and demonstrated that performance on such measures varied according to the degree of Americanization of the subject rather than his or her Nordic or southern European origins. Kurt Lewin took on the psychological analysis of prejudice and fascism in pioneering studies that explored how prejudice affects the self-esteem of individuals in a stigmatized minority. The widespread perception that American Jews as a group tended to be sensitive and neurotic was anatomized by Myerson and Brill. They demonstrated that "Jewish nervousness" was not inborn but the result of environmental causes such as Christian persecution and Jewish Orthodox fundamentalist upbringing; but they also argued that the American character would benefit from a dose of Jewish sensitivity and the compassion and self-restraint that accompanies it. And Jastrow and many of his colleagues took as their mission to arm Americans against the temptation of magical supernaturalisms, whether it was the popular preoccupations with phrenology, spiritualism, and astrology, or the more respectable new American religion of Christian Science, to which not inconsiderable numbers of Jews had been attracted.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Freudians became the dominant force within the profession of psychiatry, directing the major psychiatric hospitals and occupying the chairs of psychiatry and neurology in medical schools. But it was not until World War II that psychoanalysis made a breakthrough to popular recognition and acceptance. The trauma of battle, especially the fierce campaigns in the Pacific early in the war, focused national attention on "Guadalcanal neurosis" and the prevalence of extreme mental afflictions among soldiers during the fighting as well as in the adaptation to civilian life later on. With its doctrine that uncovering traumatic memories relieves neurosis and psychosomatic symptoms, psychoanalysis had a particularly powerful therapy to offer shell-shocked soldiers, and it was widely credited with helping to repair some of the vast psychic damage caused by the war. These perceived successes propelled psychoanalysis to the center of public consciousness and made such words as id, ego, superego, repression, and sublimation household terms.

It was with a certain Colonel Roy Grinker, one of the heads of Army psychiatry, that Liebman underwent analysis in Chicago before he was called to the pulpit of Temple Israel in Boston. The runaway success of Liebman's *Peace of Mind*, with its insistence that true religious faith cannot be attained without analytic insight, not only further contributed to the prestige of psychoanalysis but also ignited a culture war. Psychoanalysis had never needed much help in being regarded as a Jewish science; yet the fact that one of the most persuasive popularizations of its claims was put forward by a rabbi could not but enflame those streams in American religious life for which the insights of this particular science were not welcome.

The religious attack on psychoanalysis in the public realm was led by Monsignor Fulton Sheen, the charismatic radio and television priest, and by Clare Booth Luce, the celebrity convert to Roman Catholicism. There were many unseemly overtones in this assault. Freud was the great materialist; his students were the Pharisees of the soul; psychoanalysis was an expression of the moral temporizing of Judaism in contrast to the transcendent spirituality of Christianity. Yet beneath these partisan polemics, there was indeed a genuine struggle taking place over nothing less than, as Heinze renders it in the subtitle of his study, the conception of "human nature in the twentieth century." For one position, human nature remained fundamentally constituted by sin, which could be extirpated by no amount of self-reckoning. For the other, these same drives and desires became destructive only if they remained unacknowledged and unexplored.

THE POPULARIZATION AND THE diffusion of psychoanalysis in twentieth-century America is a fascinating story, and in

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Heinze's hands it yields many of the gratifications that we have come to expect from studies of popular culture: archival photographs, intriguing passages from mass-circulation magazines and books that were once madly popular but have now been forgotten, evocative links between high and low culture. Rather than telling this story on its own solid terms, however, Heinze insists on telling it as a Jewish story: a story about how a small band of Jewish psychologists, for whom (he claims) being Jewish was not accidental, succeeded in capturing and defining the American soul.

But, in the end, just how Jewish is it? On the issue of the relevance of Jewishness as an explanatory factor in the rise of the new psychology, Heinze provides no stable or consistent argument. Generally, the question of the Jewish influence on major developments in modernity is so speculative and fraught that only the most creative and rigorous historical reasoning can hope to yield insight; yet from Heinze we get only eclectic expediency. At moments he avers that the achievement of Freud and Adler was to adapt to the discipline of psychology "the rationalist moralism of German Jewry," which he sees as the distillation of centuries of Jewish family life. At his most extravagant, Heinze takes Musar, a small introspective moralizing movement within Eastern European Orthodoxy, to be a forerunner of psychoanalysis and a sign of the near future, when "Jews alienated from the synagogue" would begin to "congregate in the temple of Freud." At other times it is enough for Heinze to remark in passing that a particular pioneering psychologist came from an immigrant Jewish home that encouraged professional achievement.

Heinze is too honest not to admit the gap between the Jewish backgrounds of his protagonists and the absence of Jewish references in their work. In the case of Hugo Munsterberg of Harvard, the most famous academic psychologist in the period preceding World War I, Heinze remarks, "Hugo had little use for Judaism once he left home." Of Isador Coriat, the foremost early American interpreter of Freud, the most that can be said is that he "did nothing to repudiate his Jewishness," which in itself seems like rather a paltry kind of Jewishness. Even in the instance of Joseph Jastrow, the son of the scholarly rabbi and the brother-in-law of the great American Zionist, it must be owned that "Jastrow gave little indication of his Jewish identity in his published writings." Yet Heinze remains indefatigable in sleuthing out the Jewish backgrounds of the seminal figures in American psychology and saturating his study with biographical nuggets that verge on the gossipy. We learn, whether we want to know or not, that A. A. Brill, whose sidelocked Orthodox Galician father merits a photograph in the volume, was married to Kittie Rose Owen, a non-practicing Christian, and that they agreed to raise their children without religion. We are made privy to the fact that Dr. Joyce Brothers, the doyenne of psychological advice in the 1960s and 1970s, regretted that she failed to sit shivah for her husband Milt. And so on.

Yet even if the facts and factoids are indiscriminately mixed together, Heinze insists that the preponderance of biographical evidence must force us to confront an inevitable tipping point. So many of the leading figures in this enterprise were Jewish that *something* must be going on. It is, to be sure, a natural question, and one that is asked—not always aloud, given its inherent political incorrectness and potential for innuendo—about the prominence of Jews in medicine, science, the arts and cultural criticism, and other endeavors of modernity. Look at Einstein, Marx, and Freud, the makers of our modern world. Does not the fact of all these Jewish origins mean something?

YES, OF COURSE IT MEANS something, but the answer is usually a disappointment to those asking the question. The question—when it is an admiring question and not an anti-Semitic canard—is never disinterested, and it is usually motivated by ethnic pride and the desire to make claims for the existence of a Jewish genius for morality or innovation, or, when asked by Gentiles, a desire to offer praise for the "Jewish gifts" that have been bestowed upon civilization. The historical answer is disappointing, as I say, because it is prosaic and offers little encouragement for maintaining the mystique of Jewish difference. Veblen put it best in his famous essay "The Intellectual Pre-Eminence of the Jews in Modern Europe," in which he ascribed this pre-eminence to marginality. On the one hand, the Jews were free from both the metaphysical worldview of Christianity and the bonds of traditional Judaism, which they had quickly slipped; on the other, even though they had adopted European manners, they were never fully accepted by European society. It was this uniquely marginal location, both social and epistemological, that enabled Jews to make their pioneering critiques of human behavior and culture. With adjustments, the analysis applies to America as well, where achievement was further fired by immigrant aspirations for success in academic and professional arenas.

First and foremost, these Jewishly abetted modernisms must be recognized for what they are: profound rejections of traditional Judaism, rather than the displaced unfolding of some encoded Jewish imperative within the space of secularity. Are there intriguing remainders and carryovers from the old to the new? There are, and it is among these that Heinze energetically roots, though he lacks the fine instruments to deliver sure and nuanced analysis. But the larger truth must not be forgotten: these are only threads from a fabric that had precipitously and decisively unraveled.

It is far from accidental that the only figure in Heinze's study who takes on the relationship between psychology and religion is a rabbi and not a psychologist. We must thank Heinze for retrieving Joshua Loth Liebman's *Peace of Mind* from obscurity, for it is an extraordinary little book. (I remember seeing Liebman's volume on the shelves in my home when I was growing up; I never opened it because its title smacked of the orotund banality of the pulpit rabbis of my parents' generation.) *Peace of Mind* as a title may have been a stroke of marketing genius in its own time, but it masks a very deft exercise in apologetics. In presenting psychoanalysis to his public, Liebman made a separation between the Freudian worldview, with its horrific primal scenes and drive-ridden model of the self, and psychoanalysis as a technique for ridding people of their demons and healing their inner wounds. He soft-pedaled the former and showcased the latter for a canny purpose. He sought to extract something from the subversive modernity of Freud's teaching that could be of use in restoring the credibility of religion and in healing modern man's lacerated heart so that he could be available to heed the moral imperatives of religion. Rather than following psychoanalysis down the road to its severe and illusionless conclusion, Liebman offered it a chance for a kind of redemption. ■

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AUSTIN DIARIST

Organic Chemistry

ERNIE CORTÉS CAME TO SEE me in Washington last September. Ernie is a legendary community organizer. In 1974, he set up the Communities Organized for Public Service in San Antonio, which helped get the city's Mexican-Americans involved in politics and was partly responsible for making San Antonio one of the most progressive cities in the Southwest. Since then, under the auspices of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF)—which another legendary organizer, Saul Alinsky, established more than a half-century ago—he has built a network of community organizations in Louisiana, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and California.

ERNIE IS A SHORT, STOCKY, BALDING man in his fifties. He often frowns, and can become indignant when he thinks someone has violated an axiom of organizing, but he can also be charming and funny. He probably could have been mayor of a midsized Texas city. Or a successful college professor. A graduate school dropout, he is one of the best-read people I've met, and, whenever I run into him, we talk books, the less current the better. Last fall, he was pushing *The Death of Adam* by Marilynne Robinson and Kenneth Hoover's *Economics as Ideology*. But he also recommended Adrian Wooldrige and John Micklethwait's *Right Nation*, a book that claims the United States is turning right. That got us into an argument about what was going to happen in the November election. Ernie turned out to be far more prescient than I.

PERIODICALLY, EACH YEAR, ERNIE convenes his organizers and elected group leaders and invites a speaker to address them. The IAF organizations have scored their greatest victories reforming schools, getting money for health clinics or housing, and winning living-wage provisions, but he wants his organizers to have a broad knowledge of history, economics, philosophy, and religion; so these sessions are never narrowly focused on how to organize. The last time I attended one of these get-togethers in 1992, there were 15 or 20 people gathered in a small motel conference room. This time, about 250 people are jammed into the ballroom of Austin's Hyatt Regency. There are many clergy and ex-clergy (many of the groups are still based in churches), a few lawyers and aspiring party officials, and people of modest backgrounds who have risen up through IAF's ranks.

ERNIE WANTS ME TO TALK MOSTLY about my book on foreign policy, *The Folly of Empire*, but we devote a breakfast together and one morning's discussion in the ballroom to the election. When I had seen him in Washington, Ernie had insisted that George W. Bush was going to win because Karl Rove and Ralph Reed knew how to organize and the Democrats did not. He feels vindicated by, although unhappy with, the outcome. "The Republican strategy was developing organic infrastructure," he tells me. The GOP, he explains, worked through churches and urged parishioners to get their fellow parishioners or their neighbors to the polls. By contrast, he says, Americans Coming Together (ACT) and MoveOn "parachuted" volunteers into places where they had little in common with the people they were trying to organize. Afterward, they vanished. "They left nothing behind," he says scornfully. He thinks that, if Democrats want to win elections, they have to rebuild the "institutional infrastructure" that used to exist around churches, union halls, and precincts, but he doesn't think ACT or MoveOn have any interest in this kind of patient, person-to-person organizing.

ERNIE AND HIS COLLEAGUES, MANY OF whom come out of Latino communities in the Southwest, are also disturbed by Bush's success among Mexican-American voters. They think Bush got at least 40 percent of that vote but should have gotten no more than 20 percent. In an article Ruy Teixeira and I wrote after the election, we cited Austin's Travis County as evidence that Democrats were making inroads into postindustrial metropolitan areas, but Ernie finds this laughably irrelevant. "What about Cameron County?" he asks me. "You should have written about that. It's always been a Democratic stronghold, and it went for Bush this election." After breakfast, I go up to my hotel room to look it up. It's a largely Mexican-American county at the southern tip of Texas. Bush won it 50 to 49 percent. Al Gore had carried it by nine percentage points in 2000, and Clinton by 29 percentage points in 1996.

THE ORGANIZERS FROM NEW MEXICO attribute part of Republicans' success to Latinos' belief that the military is the best career choice for their young. But the Texans point to cultural conservatism among Catholic Latinos. One priest from San Antonio says, "Abortion was a major issue for Hispanics. There was confusion in the messages from the bishops. My congregation in San Antonio was in a lot of pain over that." He says that some Catholic Latinos who did vote for Kerry went to confession afterward to seek absolution. Ernie and the IAF organizers don't suggest that Democrats should oppose abortion, but they criticize Kerry for failing to address Catholic concerns the way Clinton did when he called for making abortion "safe, legal, and rare." Ernie says Catholic prelates tell him, "We don't expect Democrats to overturn *Roe* v. *Wade*, but give us something. Something that we can cite when the right wing attacks us." He adds, "They feel that they helped build the labor movement and the Democratic Party, and now they feel jilted."

I ARGUE WITH ERNIE ABOUT THE IMPORtance of MoveOn and the Internet. (I'd argue with him about ACT, but my limited experiences with that organization in Washington and West Virginia dispose me to share his prejudices.) There is no question, though: Ernie is a curmudgeon about the Internet. He doesn't even have an e-mail address. When I say that some people, like me, would rather belong to a virtual community than to an actual community organization, he starts banging the table—I've clearly violated an axiom of organizing. But he is not wrong about Democrats' inability to reach people who aren't always online and about the dangerous inroads that Republicans have made among Latinos. As the conference ends, we are talking books again. "By the way," he says, "have you read Joshua Mitchell's book on Tocqueville, *The Fragility of Freedom*?" I write it down on my Ernie book list, right after Robinson, Hoover, and that other book about how conservative the country is becoming.

JOHN B. JUDIS

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The Blind Men and the High School

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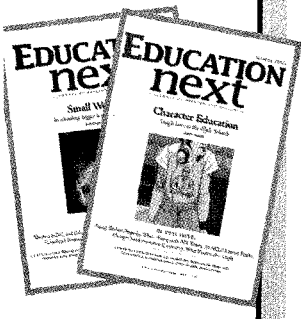

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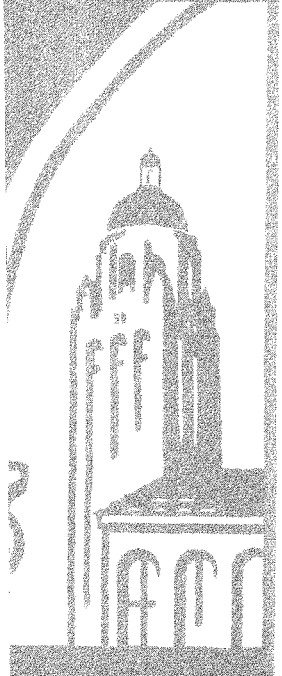

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

It is on everyone's lips: the *next big thing* in education reform is a serious focus on high school. That's what President Bush wants to do, what the Gates Foundation wants to do, and what a vast array of experts and education groups want to do.

And it's about time. **U.S. high school education remains sorely afflicted, both by sky-high dropout rates and by weak academic achievement among those who do finish.**

Yet no consensus has emerged as to what changes are needed. As I deconstruct a cornucopia of reform proposals, they group themselves into six broad solution strategies, each buttressed by a distinctive view of the core problem.

Problem 1: Schools aren't accomplishing all they could because they haven't been accountable for their results.

Solution: Extend standards-based reform to high schools by holding them to account for their students' achievement, completion rates, and so forth. Many states are doing this already, and the president wants to give it a strong push from Washington.

Problem 2: Students are not working hard enough or learning enough because it doesn't "count."

Solution: Make students pass statewide graduation tests to earn their diplomas. This version of accountability bears down primarily on kids rather than institutions. Join "tough" with "love" via rewards for success in high school, such as college scholarships for those with solid grades.

Problem 3: Too many kids are turning off and dropping out. If they don't stick around, there's no way they'll learn.

Solution: Deter dropping out by making high school more appealing: individualize it, let students move at their own pace, and create new options for those who have already fallen off the track.

Problem 4: The circa 1950s "comprehensive high school" is dysfunctional and outmoded.

Solution: Devise new institutional forms: "early college" high schools, small high schools, schools within schools, virtual high schools, and so on and give young people (and their parents) choices among them.

Problem 5: They're not learning because the courses are easy, boring, pointless, and ill-matched to the real world's demands.

Solution: Beef up the curriculum. Make advanced placement courses ubiquitous. Strengthen state academic standards. Make college prep the "default" track.

Problem 6: Academic work and intellectual activity are no way to the adolescent heart.

Solution: Get practical. Focus on "tech prep" ventures that join high schools to community colleges, work-study programs, voluntarism and community service, and other ways of tapping into the emotional, pecuniary, and social sides of young people.

One could slice these strategies differently, but observe how disparate they are. Recall the parable of the blind men and the elephant. Today, **high school reform resembles a cafeteria offering radically different schemes.**

Perhaps we are wise to pursue all of these strategies on grounds that we don't yet know what will work best for whom. But that is also a path to policy confusion and tensions if Washington moves to clamp a single regimen on all of it.

—Chester E. Finn Jr.

Chester E. Finn Jr. is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution; chairman of Hoover's Koret Task Force on K–12 Education; and president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

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Pol·i·tics (pol-i-tiks) *n.* 1. 'Poli' means many.
2. 'Tics' means blood-sucking insects.

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